

Intersex Resources

Intersex Person: An individual whose combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns. Some intersex conditions include Klinefelter's Syndrome, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, ovotestes, hypospadias, and 5 Alpha-Reductase Deficiency. Allies should never refer to intersex people as "hermaphrodites." Most intersex activists reject the word because it stigmatizes their experiences and is a mythological fallacy (no one is born fully male and fully female; earthworms and snails are hermaphroditic, not humans). Many intersex people also ask that allies avoid using "intersexual" as a noun.

How to Be an Ally to Intersex People

- Do not assume that you can tell if someone is intersexed and do not assume that you know no one who is intersexed.
- Never ask someone who is intersexed about how they have sex or what their genitals look like. This is inappropriate in every situation.
- Do not tolerate anti-intersex remarks or humor.
- Respect the confidentiality of anyone who comes out to you as intersexed.
- Refer to an intersex person by the pronoun they prefer, regardless of the person's appearance. If you are not sure of which pronoun to use, ask respectfully. Never use the word "it" when referring to someone who is intersexed. To do so is incredibly insulting and disrespectful.
- An intersex person may have undergone painful surgeries without their consent that have lasting effects on their psychological, emotional, and physical health. Consequently, an intersex person may not want to hear that infant genital surgeries are "for the best" or "necessary," as these judgments minimize or ignore their own experiences.
- Do not assume that a common genital conformation is better than an uncommon one. Many intersex people who have escaped non-consensual genital surgery express satisfaction and even delight with their uncommon bodies. The message behind genital surgeries is that uncommon genitals are unacceptable and that the person who has or had these genitals must be a "freak." This kind of message is extremely disrespectful and can severely damage a person's self-esteem.
- The Intersex Society of North America recommends assigning a gender to intersex children, but to avoid surgeries or hormone therapy until the children reach an age when they can decide their gender for themselves. If your family bears or adopts an intersex child, get all the facts, including talking with intersex adults, before making decisions about medical intervention. Your doctors may strongly pressure you to submit your child to surgery, but remember that the vast majority of intersex conditions pose no health threat to the child.
- Intersex people have often been the targets of societal violence, based on the assumption that gender is a rigid, bi-polar category that cannot be violated. You can help change this belief by examining your own ideas about gender and challenging the people around you to do the same.
- Do not automatically include intersex people in "trans" and "queer" categories. Many intersex people do not feel included in or represented by the trans and queer movements.

On the Web

Bodies Like Ours: www.bodieslikeours.org

Intersex Initiative Portland: www.ipdx.org

Intersex Society of North America (ISNA): www.isna.org

“Introduction to Intersex Activism: A Guide for Allies” (available at www.intersexinitiative.org/publications/index.html)

Survivor Project (intersex and trans survivors of domestic and sexual violence): www.survivorproject.org

“Teaching Intersex Issues: A Guide for Teachers in Women’s, Gender and Queer Studies” (available at www.intersexinitiative.org/publications/index.html)

Books

Colapinto, John. *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*. Harper Collins, 2000.

Dreger, Alice Domurat. *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

Dreger, Alice Domurat, ed. *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*. University Publishing Group, 1999.

Eugenides, Jeffery. *Middlesex*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002. (Fiction)

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Human Sexuality*. Basic Books, 2000.

Kessler, Suzanne J. *Lessons from the Intersexed*. Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Lees, Lisa. *Fool for Love*. Lulu Press, 2005. (Young adult fiction)

Preves, Sharon. *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self*. Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Videos (all available from the Intersex Society of North America)

Hermaphrodites Speak!

Is It a Boy or Girl?

Total Patient Care: The Child with an Intersex Condition (geared toward medical and mental health professionals)

Yellow for Hermaphrodites: Mani's Story

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