

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Sex assigned at birth is “the category of female, male, or intersex that a person is assigned by medical professionals at birth” (TSER). Both transgender and intersex advocates encourage the use of sex assigned at birth instead of biological sex because the latter implies that these categories are completely innate. While it is true that people naturally have different arrangements of chromosomes, hormones, and anatomies, the system by which we categorize people as female, male, and/or intersex is socially constructed.

Children who are intersex are assigned female or male based on what medical professionals anticipate their gender identity will be. Oftentimes, intersex children are subjected to surgical operations to change their anatomy to fit their assigned sex. Almost always, these surgeries are cosmetic as opposed to medically necessary, and many times they occur without the child’s understanding or consent leading to trauma.

LANGUAGE

Over the years, people have referred to intersex conditions in many different ways. The term “hermaphroditism” was commonly used well into the twentieth century. While some intersex individuals have reclaimed the term, “hermaphrodite” is offensive when used by anyone outside of the intersex community. In 2006, an international committee of medical professionals released a “Consensus Statement on the Management of Intersex Disorders” (Lee et al. 2006). In this document, they proposed the language of “disorders of sexual development (DSD)” replace intersex. While still commonly utilized in the medical context, intersex activists have critiqued the used of DSD because it problematically frames intersex as a pathology or abnormality. Some advocate for the use of differences in sexual development. Intersex is not the same as *transgender*, although some people are both intersex and transgender.

Citation: Lee et al. Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex Disorders. Pediatrics 118 (2006)

INTERSEX AWARENESS



2013 - Advocates for Informed Choice filed South Carolina state and federal lawsuits on behalf of “M.C.,” a boy who was born with

an intersex condition and who had been subjected to normalizing surgery while in custody of the state (SPLC, 2016).

2014 - MTV’s *Faking It* includes a main character with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), working closely with organizations like Advocates for Informed Choice (AIC) and InterACT (interACT, 2016).



2015 - Malta adopts the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act (GIGESC Bill), which postpones the inclusion of a gender marker on birth certificates and prohibits normalizing genital surgeries in infancy (TGEU, 2015).



2016 - The International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspends their ban on intersex athletes participating in women’s athletics (IOC, 2016).

Citations:

1. “M.C. v. Aaronson” - Southern Poverty Law Center goo.gl/f4SJEi
2. interactadvocates.org/mtv-faking-it
3. “Malta Adopts Ground-breaking...” TGEU goo.gl/WwZlwd
4. “Sex verification in sports” Wikipedia goo.gl/rjO5DG

STEPS TOWARDS ALLYSHIP

1. **Work to end the invisibilization of intersex:** Normalize an understanding of sex that extends beyond female and male. In the natural sciences especially, sex is often considered an objective truth. Challenge this understanding and normalize framing sex as a multiplicity of different anatomies, none of which are “wrong” and in need of “correction.”

2. **Advocate against cosmetic infant genital “corrective” or “normalizing” surgery:** These surgeries — which are not medically necessary for the health of the child — often have devastating physical and psychological impacts on intersex folks. They also perpetuate the stigma that there is something abnormal about being intersex. Advocate that any cosmetic genital surgery should not happen until the child is older and can decide for themselves whether or not they want to change their anatomical appearance.

3. **Do not ask invasive questions about someone’s body:** This is especially important given that intersex folks are often subjected to medical scrutiny that can be invasive, shameful, and traumatic. If an intersex person wants to share their experiences, it should always be their decision and on their terms.

4. **Advocate for all-gender facilities:** Because of their experiences, some intersex folks may feel more comfortable using bathrooms, locker rooms, etc. that are all-gender or single-user.

5. **Respect intersex individuals’ identities:** Do not assume or challenge any person’s relationship to their gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, or physical body.

Some recommendations adapted from Cary Gabriel Costello (goo.gl/FVQ8w8)

WHAT IS INTERSEX?



CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES

Intersex Society of North America
www.isna.org

Organization Intersex International (OII)-USA
www.oii-usa.org

LGBTQIA+ Definitions
www.tser.org/definitions

“Advice on Being an Ally to Intersex People” -
Cary Gabriel Costello (goo.gl/FVQ8w8)

“Bias Against Intersex Olympics Athletes Is
What’s Unfair - Not These Athletes’ Bodies” -
Pidgeon Pagonis and Georgiann Davis (goo.gl/7kN8jK)

Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis -
Georgiann Davis

Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived
Experience - Katrina Karkazis

Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the
Construction of Sexuality - Anne Fausto-Sterling



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Intersex Inclusivity and Steps Towards Allyship

This information resource was create to aid students, faculty, staff, and individuals of the broader community to better understand intersex identities and to take steps towards active allyship. The aim of this resource is to foster intergroup dialogue on campus, in the workplace, and in the Tucson community.



26 OCT 2014
RESPECT
INTERSEX
RIGHTS:
DIVERSE
BODIES &
DIVERSE
IDENTITIES.

oii.org.au

October 26 is Intersex Awareness Day

Citation: Williams, Nina. “The Imposition of Gender: Psychoanalytic Encounters With Genital Atypicality.” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 19 (2002).