

The Condition of “Intersex...”

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<https://interactadvocates.org/about-us/mission-history/>

The Condition of “Intersex...” Let’s Not Forget These Children and Adults in the Context of Gender-Affirming Care

I must start with a disclaimer... I am not an expert in this subject matter. I have not spent hours studying this condition, but I know enough to make a statement, and hopefully it will spark an interest in others to learn more about it within the current social-political landscape.

The condition of “Intersex,” formerly known as “Hermaphroditism,” is more prevalent than one may think. Some babies are born with ambiguous external genitalia, making gender identification at birth without a DNA test more challenging. Or, they may be born without internal sex organs, such as a uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries, or testicles. I know of one case, a child raised as a female in a family we knew years ago, where they were not diagnosed with the condition until age 18. By their late teen years, they had not started menstruation, and had not developed normal secondary sex characteristics. This child’s medical workup found she did not have the internal sex organs of the female gender she identified with. This was 30-ish years ago, when there wasn’t a lot of data on the subject. I’m also aware of adoptions of Intersex children, and had they not been adopted, they would have languished in overseas orphanages.

I remember an “Oprah” episode, years ago, where she invited several hermaphrodites to be guests on her show where they discussed the condition. In retrospect, it seems exploitative. But, it still resonates with me today. Oprah tried to get one of the guests to say whether they were biologically male or female, and they politely declined. You couldn’t tell by their outward appearance. These guests helped pave the way for non-binary gender identity.

Remember the skit on Saturday Night Live called “It’s Pat?” Pat was an androgenous character, created and performed by Julia Sweeney in the early 90s. The central humorous premise was that the viewers, and Pat’s companions in the skits, were always trying to guess their gender. This skit wouldn’t go over very well today.

The subject of Intersex condition is relevant today because of the political and social backlash of gender affirming health care. According to the InterACT Association, which is an organization that advocates for intersex youth, the Intersex condition comprises about 1.7% of births. That’s a lot. Their “Compassion Statement” states why they do what they do... InterACT believes that the law, properly used, is a tool for achieving justice; and that justice, properly understood, has compassion at its heart. Legal advocates have always played an important role in protecting the most vulnerable members of society, such as children born with intersex traits or variations of sex development.

Gender affirming care is an issue that has become sensationalized as it makes headlines. It needn’t be this way. The decision to affirm gender care should be between a child and their family, and their team of medical professionals. It does not need to be debated on the state and national stage. We know that Intersex is a condition. It is well-documented. And the decision to have surgery or take medications to affirm the gender they identify with should not be

exploited or denied as they seek affirming care. These individuals and their families deserve grace and mercy as they navigate through their lives. We can't recognize intersex by one's appearance, just how we can't tell if a person has diabetes or high blood pressure. So, why not just show grace and mercy to all people, regardless of their gender, or health conditions, or belief systems. Keep these children and individuals in mind as you form an opinion on the complex nature of gender affirming care.