

Intersex and Intersexuality

**Introduction of Intersex, and Intersexuality**

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### **Abstract**

There is an extraordinary special moment in life for many couples. The magical day where they welcome a newborn child into the world. Everyone is excited for the pink or blue, male, or female baby that is being brought into this world. Naturally, people try to prepare for these moments. They set up a nurse, stockpile on diapers, begin to buy clothes, and any other items in which they can be ready for the child about to be. While this would ideally be straight forward for new parents, as they have got the news, they are having a boy, or they are having a girl. However, no one can prepare themselves for the news that their child is not male nor female, but that the newborn infant is intersexed. Another term used today in the field to describe this is someone born with ambiguous genitalia. There are several components that must first be acknowledged in order to solidify an understanding on the term intersex, intersexuality and what they mean.

### **What intersex is**

The condition in which one is born with ambiguous genitals, which previously was called hermaphroditism was once known to be synonymous with the term intersex. Which as we know now, there are several significant differences between the two. All of which are surrounded by intense controversies. The clinical condition from Theron's article "Being born intersex" which refers to giving birth to a hermaphrodite, or what is now known as an intersex child is called an ovotesticular disorders of sex development, or DSD (Theron, 2007.) From this point, the infant is born with both male and female sets of reproductive organs. The term hermaphrodite is typically defined in medical settings as a disorder of sexual development.

The term intersex also refers to a disorder of sexual development, though majorly deemphasizes and circumvents the negative sexual and political associations. The terms intersex instead accentuates the underlying genetic and endocrine factors that cause the development in a prenatal stage to take a distinctive, and noteworthy path.

### *The cause of intersexuality*

Now that we know the term intersex refers to the condition of having both male and female sex organs or other sexual characteristics such as ambiguous genitalia, we can better apprehend the causes of it. Take the case of little Ben for instance Rosario's 2009 article "The new Science of Intersex." Ben was a well-cared for and nourished baby with an unusually tempestuous history. The Jone's Family had been told that they had delivered a baby boy. Several days after the birth of the newborn infant from a small, rural hospital, the family received an unforeseen call left on their answering machine. "Your child's a girl! Take him to UCLA right away for a surgery to become a girl!" (Rosario, 2007) Chromosomal testing had revealed unpredicted genetic differences. They were born with the normal number of 46 chromosomes but had two X sex chromosomes in their DNA instead of the typical XY configuration. Further intricate testing done also showed that they had an SRY gene on one of the X chromosomes.

**Further research into intersexuality.** The SRY gene which is responsible for the sex determining region of the Y was identified by practitioners and scientist only decades ago. This identification came only after half a century of searching for the degrading, shameful, and taboo once known cause of hermaphroditism. The condition that was known to produce developing embryos to develop testis. The hypothesis of 1960-1970's was that once the testes start to form, they generate all the needed hormones that promote the development of male internal and

external genitalia. Thanks to cases like Ben's in the 1980's further genetic testing had been done to discover the rare cross-over event during sperm formation that can lead the SRY transfers from Y to X as previously stated. Resulting in a newborn baby with anomalies of genital development. In Ben's case, resulting in an infant with a penis but with XX chromosomes and a vagina with XY chromosomes. With no SRY on the Y chromosome (Rosario 2007.)

*Perspective on Intersexuality show its psychological significance.* In the early 1990's activists advocated intersex to bring to light the discrepancy between the numerous components that go into one's sexual anatomy. Particularly to show how alienating the word hermaphrodite was to these children and their families. As the term previously used implied a self-conscious alternative gender identity and sexuality. Though author Elizabeth Reis brings up in her paper "Divergence or Disorder" from the Perspective in Biology in Medication that using the term disorder only further sanctifies negative connotations. "I argue that using disorder is problematic, because it implies medical conditions in need of repair, when some intersex anatomies, though atypical, do not necessarily need surgical or hormonal correction," (Reis, 2007.)

As a part of any study, change is inevitable over time. This change must be acknowledged. The conditions previously categorized under the broad spectrum of "hermaphroditism" are now generally being called disorders of sex development. Disorders not only imply that something is wrong, but also that something needs to be fixed. Whereas the coined term intersexual specifically identifies individuals simply born intersexed with extra reproductive parts or ambiguous genitals. The terms hermaphrodite, intersex, and disorders of sex development are disputable and divisive. Though defining such an instance in stone, causes many political as well as medical questions.

## Discussion

David Cruz's article "Getting sex right" address how the choice of nomenclature influences not only how doctors interpret medical situations but, equally as important, how parents view their affected children. Elizabeth McDonalds article "Critiquing gender Normalizing Surgery" gives insight to a note worthy debate as to who is even considered intersex. "There is considerable debate about who should be considered "intersex", given that millions of people worldwide do not follow the typical sexual differentiation path and have sex indicators that are not all clearly male or female." (McDonald, 2015) There are those that believe the new term intersex should only apply to those born with ambiguous genitalia, or genitalia that are unclear. However, this does not include the numerous variations of sexual development with respect to abnormal chromosomes in their genes, the development of gonads, or surgeries preformed on at such a young age not much can be learned about the condition. In short, the term intersex is too new to have any sort of definitive terms to be applied to it. From the treatment of intersex, to the understanding and founding, there is still much research, testing and work to be done in this area to better understand and improve the lives of those with this disorder of sexual development.

**Citations**

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