

Where can I find more information?

For more information on LGBT issues; questions regarding OHIO SafeZone, SpeakOUT!, and campus organizations; or to check-out a book, magazine, or video from our Resource Library; visit the LGBT Center.



The OHIO SafeZone project is a voluntary, educational effort to support LGBT & Questioning students, faculty, and staff at Ohio University by attending a two hour workshop and by displaying a SafeZone card. If you are an LGBT supporter, it is time to act!

SpeakOUT!

Speaker's Bureau & Education Project

SpeakOUT! is a dynamic speaker's bureau and education project that has been assisting class instructors, student organizations, and resident assistants with their speaker/education needs for years. Formats include a panel presentation, Coming Out 101, or tailor-made presentations.

Resource Library

Our Resource Library is a collection of books, magazines, and videos on a variety of topics including LGBT history, legislation, biographies, fiction, and religion in relation to LGBT concerns, as well as coming out resources. Check it out today!

Campus Resources

LGBT Center Library:

Lessons from the Intersexed by Suzanne Kessler

As Nature Made Him by John Colapinto

Online Resources

Intersex Society of North America:
<http://www.isna.org/>

Intersex Initiative (Portland, OR):
<http://intersexinitiative.org/>

The UK Intersex Association:
<http://www.ukia.co.uk/>

Bodies Like Ours:
<http://www.bodieslikeours.org/>



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

INTERSEX DEFINITIONS & ISSUES

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Center

**354 Baker Center
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701**

**740.593.0239
www.ohio.edu/lgbt**

A person's biological sex, like gender expression and sexuality, isn't always an either-or matter. Biological sex can fall anywhere on a spectrum between male and female, and those that fall between the two categories are generally termed "intersex."

What does Intersex mean?

Technically, intersex is defined as "congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system." Intersex people are born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or an endocrine system that are different from most other people. About one in 2,000 babies are visibly intersexed, and many more aren't detected until later in life. There is no single "intersex body"; it encompasses a wide variety of conditions that do not have anything in common, except that they are deemed "abnormal" by society.

What makes intersex people similar is their experiences of medicalization, not biology. Intersex is not an identity. While some intersex people do reclaim it as part of their identity, it is not a freely chosen category of gender—it can only be reclaimed. Most intersex people identify as men or women.

Are Intersex Conditions Harmful?

In general, intersex conditions do not cause the person to feel sick or in pain. However, some intersex conditions are associated with serious health issues, which need to be treated medically. Surgically "correcting" the appearance of intersex genitals will not change these underlying medical needs.

Intersex Genital Mutilation

Since the mid-20th century, doctors promoted early surgeries on infants with visibly intersexed genitalia on the assumption that they would grow

up confused about their identities and possibly end up queer without intervention. They believed that if they could surgically construct "normal" genitalia, everything would be fine. However, there is no medical data to support this theory.

In 1993, with the formation of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), some intersex people who experienced intersex genital mutilation (IGM) in infancy and/or childhood came forward with testimonies of their pains—both the physical pain of repeated unsatisfactory surgeries and the emotional pain of having one's body and sexuality violated, in addition to all the isolation, secrecy and shame they were forced to live with. People who have had IGM performed on them often experience post-traumatic responses similar to those resulting from child sexual abuse (because it is a form of child sexual abuse). ISNA and other intersex activists aim to end "secrecy, shame, and unwanted genital surgery."

How does the Intersex movement fit into the LGBT Movement?

First, intersex bodies are pathologized and erased in a way that is similar to how homosexuality has historically been treated within psychiatry (until 1973). Even though homosexuality has been officially depathologized for over three decades, transgender people are still labeled as having "gender identity disorder" and thus treated as something abnormal rather than a natural human variety. From this point of view, intersex is just another sexual minority that is pathologized and treated as "abnormal."

Secondly, the surgical treatment for intersex conditions is heavily motivated by homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny. Western medicine defines "functional" male and female genitalia in terms of ability to participate in heterosexual intercourse, rather than how much sexual enjoyment patients can achieve—which is why removing a

woman's clitoris is medically acceptable according to (mostly male and straight) doctors, as long as her vagina is deep enough to be penetrated by a penis.

However, some concerns have been raised also about LGBT groups adopting the "I." First, some people fear that adding the "I" would give the wrong impression that all or most intersex people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. Obviously, some intersex people are and some aren't. When dealing with young children and their parents, there is a concern that the association with LGBT would drive away parents of intersex children who would otherwise seek out information and resources about intersex conditions.

Also, in society, intersex issues are often put under the LGBT label already. Constantly being combined with LGBT might prevent intersex issues from getting their own visibility or make it hard for intersex people to find intersex-specific resources.

Similar to this, there is also a concern that adding the "I" would make it appear as if intersex people's needs and LGBT people's needs are the same. For example, adding intersex to a non-discrimination ordinance or a hate crime law is completely insufficient to address the human rights issues faced by intersex people, but it gives the false impression that intersex people's rights are being protected.

Information edited from The Survivor Project's Introduction to Intersexuality and Intersex Activism at: <http://www.survivorproject.org/is-intro.html> and also edited from The Intersex Initiative's FAQ page at: <http://intersexinitiative.org/articles/intersex-faq.html>

Web Resources

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<http://www.isna.org/>

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