Intersex Bibliography
Texts to Consider for Use in Women’s/Gender/Queer/Sexualities Studies

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Main Texts:

[The only collection available that includes multiple perspectives on intersex.]

[Booklet designed for activists who want to learn about intersex.]

I. Basic Information: History, Biology and Medicine

[History of the medicalization of intersex.]

[Chapter from the actual medical textbook used in medical schools.]

[Extremely graphic medical training video used in medical schools. First a doctor describes the birth of intersex child as “social and medical emergency,” then shows the actual surgeries of young girls with intersex conditions. At the end of the film, one of the girls is brought back for a 6-month post-surgery checkup, but she resists having her legs spread apart, kicking and screaming “NO!!!” Eventually doctors manage to pull apart her legs, camera zooms into her genital area, and a doctor says how successful the surgical result is. Think long and hard before using this film—consider both (1) its impact on students, some of whom have survived childhood sexual abuse and rape, and (2) the ethics of using a film that could easily be labeled “true rape video.” I used it in my Intersex Studies course only because I had the whole term to process it, and after I gave my students the option to not view it.]

II. Voices from the Intersex Movement


Chase, C. (1997). Hermaphrodites Speak! Available from ISNA. [First and (so far) only documentary made by and about intersex people.]

ISNA Newsletters. Available from <www.isna.org>

III. Disability Theory


IV. Scholarly Texts by Intersex People and Allies


Dreger, A. (2001). History’s Place in the Intersex Movement. Available from ISNA. [Video of Dreger’s presentation; helpful hints for how academics can help activist work.]


V. Reform Movement Within Medicine


VI. Critiquing Texts Produced About Intersex: Examples

[Fausto-Sterling proposed in 1993 the creation of three (inter)sex categories in addition to male and female, before she met any intersex person; she withdrew “five sexes” theory in 2000.]

[Dr. Marion chooses not to disclose the diagnosis of androgen insensitivity syndrome to his patient because he felt that the discovery would be too traumatic for her—but nonetheless feels perfectly free to write an article about it in a popular magazine. Would it not be more traumatic if the patient saw this article?]

[In this award-winning paper, Natarajan argues why patients should not be told the diagnosis of androgen insensitivity syndrome.]
V. Critiquing Texts Produced About Intersex: Praxis

Materials listed here contain the discussion of intersex that I feel is very problematic. In my Intersex Studies course, I assigned each students one or two such materials for them to write critical papers. Some of them are completely wrong or disgusting, and some are otherwise good materials that contain significant inaccuracy or misperceptions.

[Daaboul and Frader characterize the goal of the intersex activism as the creation of three or five sexes—a common misperception arising from Fausto-Sterling’s *The Five Sexes* and not from any actual intersex people—and criticize them for it. This article was written before Dr. Daaboul met with us, and he is now one of our biggest allies.]

[Anti-transsexual essay by a radical feminist. Greer argues, among other things, women with androgen insensitivity syndrome—women who are typically raised and lived as a girl/woman all of their lives—should not be considered “women” because they have XY chromosomes.]

[National president of PFLAG uses “five sexes” theory to argue that homosexuality is not a sin.]

[Points out that much of the information about intersex available on the internet (like ISNA’s web site) do not conform to the recommendations of the medical community, and suggests that surgeons should direct parents which web sites to look at.]

[“The crusading indignation of adult intersexuals, however justified, must be weighed against the rights of newborns to have as normal and unstressed a childhood as possible.”]

[One-hour documentary about intersex with no actual intersex people on it.]

[Mischaracterizes the mission of ISNA by suggesting that it opposes assigning genders to intersex children, when in reality ISNA opposes that the idea that surgeries are necessary for gender assignment.]
[Article by the lawyer who specializes in defending doctors from malpractice suits brought by patients. Warns doctors of the liability involved in intersex surgeries, and give concrete suggestions on how to continue performing surgeries while protecting themselves from possible lawsuits.]

[Sketchy plot involving an intersex girl named Barbie; silly jokes e.g. “turn Barbie into Ken.”]

[High school classmates of Rachael spread the rumor that she was a “hermaphrodite” as a revenge. Ends with “Rachel, even with that rumor, you were one of the most popular girls in school. I mean, everyone wanted to be like you. One girl wanted to be like you so much, she stuffed her pants with a tootsie roll.”]


VIII. Books to Request Libraries to Carry

Books on this list are not necessarily recommended as a text (the Dreger anthology is the best because it includes many perspectives, including many intersex people’s) course, but nonetheless good resource for students and teachers.


[Disregard the author’s essentialist, anti-trans, anti-feminist, and otherwise conservative politics and focus on how this little child felt as he grew up—because his experience is similar to that of many intersex children, although he is technically not intersex.]

For more information about intersex, or list of additional resources, please visit <www.isna.org>.

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