

Intersex in humans essay



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From the day of birth the majority of humanity is taught that we are split into two categories: male and female. As a child, it may be hard to understand otherwise, and these two genders serve specific roles in society. But as one grows older they find that there are people who try to break one barrier and go into another and some with reason enough because they were born differently, and their genes dictate that they are neither 100 % male nor 100% female.

With people that don't understand this concept, the infant born this way may be forced to be one gender and not the other, despite their physical attributes. Variables that cause intersex in humans arise before birth in the persons' development, and this may cause social problems that one will have to cope with. To be clear, to be an "intersexed" person, means to be one who is "born with various ambiguities of genital appearance or chromosomal or hormonal differences", defined by Fausto-Sterling (and cited in Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008, p. 24).

These differences are caused by either an excess of an opposite sex hormone, such as androgens in women, causing congenital adrenal hyperplasia, or a strange pairing in the XY or XX patterns in sex chromosomes, which could be a mosaic of intermixed XY or XX in the chromosome. But because this pattern isn't the only cause in determining a person's sex, there isn't a true simple way to identify gender that's the same with all persons. It is also important to point out that a person physically cannot be all male and all female, the term for this being hermaphrodite.

This is an “ outdated nomenclature”, as stated by the Intersex Society of North America (Is an intersex..., 2008). But this term seems to be debated amongst researchers and scholars, because of findings of some who are claimed to be true hermaphrodites. If this is possible, the occurrence of a true hermaphrodite would be extremely rare because of other variables such as hormones. Intersex is commonly divided into four categories, based on their characteristics and causes, which are: 46, XX Intersex, 46, XY Intersex, True Gonadal Intersex, or Complex or Undetermined Intersex (Intersex, 2011).

The first of these, 46, XX Intersex is one who is a female by chromosomes, but because of prenatal exposure to male hormones the person has the outward appearance of a male. Another cause for this is from an enzyme deficiency, aromatase deficiency, where the enzyme that normally turns male hormones into female hormones stops working. 46, XY Intersex, is the opposite of the category just mentioned, where the person by chromosomes is a male but outward appearances point towards being a female.

This involves problems with the development of testosterone and using testosterone, rather, than an overexposure to female hormones. Androgen insensitivity syndrome falls under this category, where the receptors for male hormones are failing. This is the most common cause. A person may outwardly appear to be a hermaphrodite under the category True Gonadal Intersex. In this, the person may have a combination of the two different sex chromosomes and the genitals are ambiguous and a combination of both sexes. Causes for this are unknown.

Other sex chromosome disorders fall under Complex or Undetermined Intersex. This includes disorders such as Klinefelter's syndrome, (XXY) or Turner's syndrome (XO, missing chromosome). These disorders are more focused on the discrepancies in hormone levels rather than distinguishing in genitalia, which is not usually the problem. Numerous experiments have been done, although whether some of the procedures were ethical were highly debatable, where an infant born intersex has been surgically changed to be one sex or the other.

The ethical debate is so controversial for one reason being that the physicians and parents are making decisions based on social norms rather than biological concerns. In one common case, John/Joan, in the early 1960's identical twin baby Bruce (" John") was the victim of an accident in his circumcision and with the pressure on his parents for his future, they decided it would be best to reassign him to a female. In the end, " Joan", as a teenager, after learning of this mishap, had surgeries to make her a male again.

Although in this case the child wasn't born intersex, it started the protest against sex change surgeries before the person was of age of consent. To be an intersex in our society can often cause great social discrimination. In a culture raised in dichotomy, where anything outside male and female seems strange and unnatural, people born " intersexed" will fall under ridicule and harsh criticism by a community that doesn't understand. In one case, in 1993, a transgender named Brandon Teena (born Teena Brandon) moved from town to town living as a male.

In Falls City, Nebraska, he had two friends, Tom Nissen and John Lotter. On Christmas Eve, after being released from the police for check fraud and rumors had circled about Brandon being a woman, Nissen and Lotter forced him to expose himself, and after discovering his true gender, they “ forced Brandon to leave the party with them and proceeded to drive to a desolate area of town, where each in turn raped him,” (Sloop, 2004, p. 51). After threatening Brandon with death if he reported, Brandon escaped through a window of the bathroom and got to the police, who started an investigation and Brandon went into hiding.

Brandon was fatally shot a week later by Nissen and Lotter. This case turned hearts in the intersex and transgender community, and shows the brutality that can come while being different. This is troublesome in this day and age because as many as 1. 7% are estimated to be intersexual (Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008, p. 25) Many cope with these differences by having procedures done or hormones taken to transition and fit in with the opposite that they most comfortably feel they should be. Some of the procedures done include breast removal, metoidioplasty, hysterectomy, or phalloplasty.

Gay-Straight alliances in schools often promote equalities for gay, straight, bisexual as well as transgendered and intersexed persons. Although maybe being an intersex falls under a mutation in prenatal conditions, this still requires that they are treated the same, as all people are treated the same. Changing who a person is before they are capable of understanding their biology is unethical. Completely changing ones gender without their consent is to change their identity, which in America, we are free to choose. In the

future with a better education of such conditions, maybe discrimination won't be as relevant as it has been in history.