4. Perspectives on Identity, Medical Violence and Legal Protection/Recognition

InterAct is a policy organization based in the United States that is committed to using legal strategies for the protection of intersex children and young adults. In the United States, there are resolutions in California, New York and Texas that encourage medical practitioners to consider the bodily autonomy of young intersex people. However, at the time of writing, there are no enforcement measures in place to prevent harm.

As a result of unnecessary medical intervention, people who are survivors of these surgeries often contend with lifelong issues related to surgery, which include scarring, loss of sensation, incontinence, osteoporosis, as well as psychological trauma from medical exams and vaginal dilation. If people are assigned genders that are incongruent with their internal sense of self, they may be labelled as having gender dysphoria and encounter some of the same issues transgender folks have accessing hormones, gender affirming surgeries and obtaining appropriate identity documents.

However, not all people with variations of sex characteristics experience surgery or pathologization. Intersex traits can appear in infancy, childhood or adolescence. Depending on the cultural context, doctors or midwives may recognize intersex traits or not. While people with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) may not have been subjected to gender normalization surgeries, many people with PCOS have experienced medicalization to make their sex traits align with gender norms (i.e. female hormones via birth control). Conservative doctors make it seem that intersex people who have endured forced medicalization are a small, vocal minority while asserting that the silent majority are happy with surgery. Although more people are coming out about having intersex variations (especially people with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) and hyperandrogenism), intersex identity and embodiment are still highly stigmatized. As a result, even if people have not experienced forced medicalization, they would still not disclose their intersex status, which is their right.

Although queer and trans communities go back and forth about whether intersex belongs in the LGBT acronym, the fact is that there are intersex people who belong to queer and trans communities. However, not all intersex people identify with the LGBT community, and many intersex people are cisgender. Especially in a classroom setting where a young person might be coming into awareness of having an intersex variation, it is important to nurture an environment

where intersex embodiment is not conflated with sexuality and gender.

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