YOUth&I

Issue 1

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Edited by Steph Lum

YOUth&I acknowledges the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, who are the Traditional Custodians on the land on which this book was edited, printed and distributed.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge that the land is stolen land, which we benefit from occupying, and that sovereignty was never ceded.

YOUth&I extends this acknowledgement to all First Nations peoples around the world on whose lands these entries were created.

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This project has been funded by the ACT Capital of Equality grants program. YOUth&I gratefully acknowledges the support of the ACT Office for LGBTIQ Affairs.

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In this anthology the writers and artists openly share their thoughts and experiences. Some of these experiences include mention of coerced medical intervention, trauma and suicidality.

Foreword

It feels incredible to be able to say—here is YOUth&I, a collection of literary and artistic works from some amazingly talented young intersex people!

Who are intersex people? To be intersex—born with variations in sex characteristics—is not to be any one thing. There are intersex women, intersex men and intersex non-binary people. There are intersex people of all ages, all backgrounds, all faiths and all sexual orientations. We know of over 40 intersex variations. With so many different body types, intersex people can have wildly different needs from each other and have different experiences in relation to how they have been treated by people around them and how they see themselves.

Nevertheless, to live with an intersex body means to navigate a world not designed for you. At best, you must constantly face assumptions about your body and assumptions about your identity, as well as scepticism and inappropriate healthcare. At worst, you experience a complete disregard for your bodily autonomy and integrity, experience of medical abuse, distrust and fear, and lies about your body and history.

For these reasons, intersex people are a largely hidden and silenced population. Many of us grow up with the stigma and shame of difference, the experience of medical interventions (often without our consent) to change our bodies to look more like typical women and men, and silence within our families and society as to our experiences and the existence of other intersex people. This has made it difficult for us to learn about ourselves, find community, and speak out publicly.

But intersex people are finding each other. We are forming communities, speaking out about our experiences and the wrongs that have harmed us—in Canberra, in Australia, and around the world.

For those who choose to speak, the personal cost can be great, and made more difficult when others tell our stories for us—often sensationalist, shifting focus onto the issues they see as important, discrediting our experiences, and changing our words to tell the stories they want to tell. But we are the storytellers of our own lives.

Some people promise us change; some claim that change has already happened. And still we keep telling our stories, waiting for the stories to change. Waiting for all intersex people to grow up happy, loved, empowered to make choices over their own bodies, proud of their difference, and connected with community.

YOUth&I gives us a younger generation of storytellers. It provides a space for young intersex people to share their stories in their own words and not be taken out of context or rewritten by endosex (non-intersex) people. A space for intersex voices to be heard in their own right. A chance to educate the people we live with and to connect with others including those who, even if they don't know the word intersex, might pick up this book and recognise some of these stories and experiences within themselves.

Creating safe spaces in community to share, hear, and hold each other is incredibly important. While the intersex community in Australia is growing, so far it has been difficult to create and sustain spaces solely for intersex youth. YOUth&I provides a space for young intersex people in Australia and elsewhere to share, create, be visible, and be valued. It is one answer to the challenges of storytelling in a world that is only just beginning to listen and where sharing can be painful, unsupported, unsafe, and where it is not always clear whether it will lead to change. It is also one answer to the challenges of bringing together young intersex people and giving them the opportunity to express the creativity and joy in their lives.

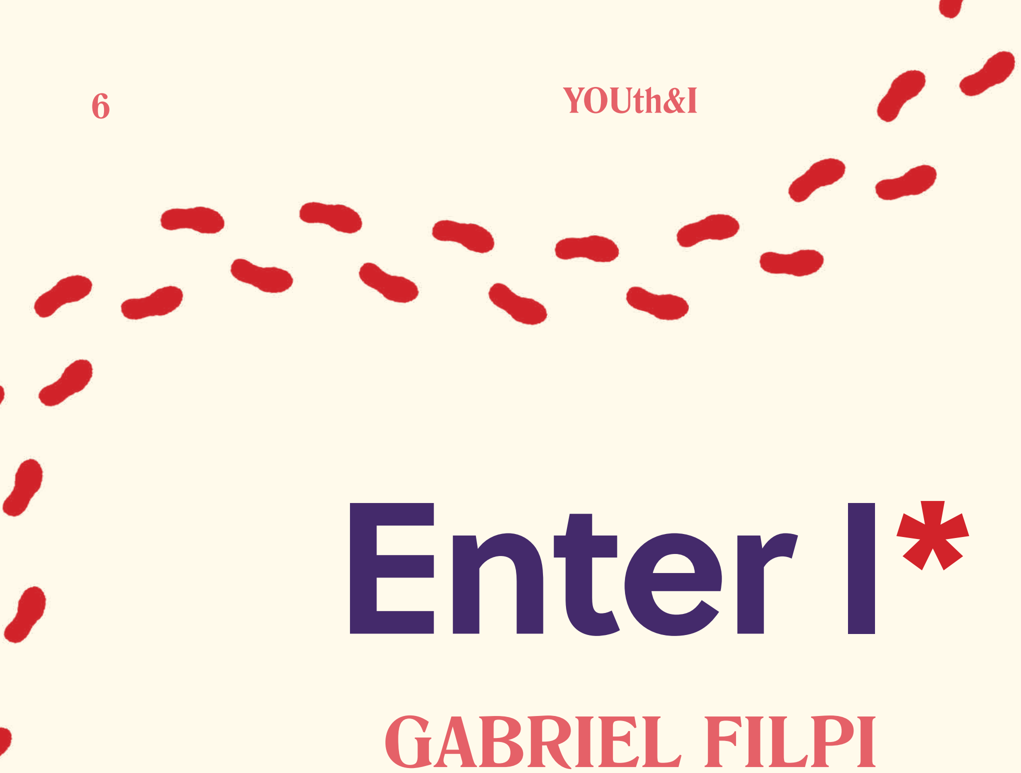
This project has been supported by the ACT Capital of Equality grants program, run by the ACT government and administered by the Office for LGBTIQ Affairs. We are fortunate in Canberra to have a small but growing number of young intersex people who are willing to speak up and who are encouraged and supported by allies in the wider community. While intended as a one-off publication, the creative potential of intersex young people is limitless and in time there may be further issues. In the meantime, this issue captures a particular moment: an insight into how intersex people think and talk about themselves, their experiences growing up in this time, the growth of an intersex community in Australia and around the world, and the development of an intersex movement.

In these pages you will find us reflecting privately and speaking publicly. Speaking to our friends, parents, doctors. To each other. You will find our stories are not all like each other's—we have so many different body types, different experiences with family and interactions with doctors, different cultural contexts, and we live in different places and in different times. But what you will consistently find is great honesty, humility, and great strength found in community. What an honour to be trusted to read these stories and have the opportunity to learn from the wisdom of these young people who show us different ways of living and being in this world, and shared with such generosity and heart.

Here is a community of
young intersex people. Here
is **YOUth&I**.

Steph Lum
Editor

Contents



Enter I*

GABRIEL FILPI

*Intersex

Enter I*,
Into my life.

I, Imagine,
I—Myself—Me.
In a world where I can be,
I*
and I don’t have to try,
To fit in places
where
I
do
not.

I knew,
Long before the words formed and breached and bathed in sunlight,
Exposed,
There to reap.
Long before seeds were sewn,
This truth was always mine and I carried it.

Quiet.
Sigh.
and cry
and watch days go by,
Fall away.
Piece by piece, I not yet something whole, but worn.
A hole,
Torn within torrid expectations of the child I, was supposed to be.
Fraught, with fear, and hope and beauty and radical self-love.
Acceptance,
Only after odysseys,
Across landscapes of change and pills and pain,
A chance at something better.

Grasped between fingers, tight
Firm and solid,
For the first time
unlike the fine sand of yesterday that
always
slipped
away.

I*,
Took root and grew, forming something new.
I*, I, exist beyond imagination,
I am here and whole and
I am realised

Enter I*,
Into my life
At this time,
The right time.
And now I see—

I*
was always
me.

If I’m at all like a flower

MARI WROBI

My body is intersex.

And no, that does not mean that my body is broken, abnormal or diseased.

Still the context of my body has been defined and rewritten in and out of existence so many times that I don’t know what it is or where I stand.

They compare me to flowers, as if our reproductive systems and parts are the same, only what’s in a name? If I’m at all like flowers, it’s only in what I—to get here—overcame.

But how does one heal in a body that was surgically constructed to conform to pain?

They whisper words about “your future husband” because the theoretical pleasure and existence of a man—your groom—and of your own heterosexuality and submission is somehow more important than letting you bloom.

The word “necessary” has all but lost its meaning, ringing through my ears—used in a way that implies that the procedures and medications and treatments are unavoidable when my body was unbroken from the start.

Unbroken.

Like the mirror that reflects there are no horns on my head or targets on my back.

Like the picture-perfect definition of diversity that accepts red hair and green eyes as natural, beautiful, true—but not you who shares the same percentage—2%—of the population too.

And for all its late-night, prime-time recognition, the word "intersex" evokes the same amount of concern and confusion as a highway travelled upon so seldom that no one seems to understand it at all… Only those who do travel upon it write into their science books that hermaphrodites are small, biological mistakes too rare to even bother discussing in much more than hushed voices and disgusted tones as if my body was nothing more than a biological exception from its conception in their laboratories where I don't belong.

But my body is whole.

Normal.

Natural.

My body planted a garden inside me that reminds me that we are not as binary as they made us out to be. That if I'm at all like a flower—by any other name—it's in the fact that my body and my mind are vibrant, and thriving, and alive with the same refusal to be subjugated as dandelions growing through the cracks of concrete that say, "you will not stop me from growing".

So don't confuse me for someone on the outside looking in, at the categories I have defied, wishing to be defined by just another check mark in a box.

My body is intersex.

And my lips know it.

So, read them when I say:

You can never hope to contain me.

You cannot change me.

And you do not know me better than I know myself.

Beyond pink and blue

GEORGIA ANDREWS

Pregnancy tests.

Ultrasounds.

Gender reveal parties.

Maternity shopping.

Childbirth.

On the day we take our first breath, a clinician typically lifts us in the air, does a speedy examination, and pronounces our sex. At some hospitals, bright lights flash pink and blue on the street front to celebrate the birth of a new baby boy or girl.

My parents welcomed me into the world in the 1990s. A month premature, I eventually escaped my incubator to be clothed in a pink hat and blanket, before travelling home to a childhood of pink clothes and pink teddy bears.

Fast forward 16 years, to a new life at an all-girls boarding school.

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My health started to deteriorate in Year 12, beginning a long journey of medical tests. We eliminated the possibilities of epilepsy and brain cancer over many months. I returned to the specialist clinic for an emergency consultation and results revealed that despite my body being physically female, I was actually born with XY chromosomes. In a binary sense, cisgender females typically present with XX chromosomes, while cisgender males typically have XY chromosomes. To my shock, my doctor told me that I was "not a normal woman"; that my condition meant that I was infertile, as I did not have ovaries; that I would never be permitted to compete in the Olympic Games; and that I would never meet another person in the world like me. Their parting comment was that my diagnosis and new-found infertility had to be kept a complete secret from everybody I knew. To them, I sat uncomfortably outside of binary gender norms.

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Several years later, after endless research, I learned that I was intersex—an umbrella term used to describe nearly 2% of the global population born with biological variations of sex characteristics (such as hormones, chromosomes, and/or physical anatomy) that cannot clearly be labelled under binary definitions of 'male' or 'female' bodies. In a sense, I see my body as sitting in the middle of a spectrum of human diversity. *Intersex* is often confused with transgender which is traditionally used to describe people who were assigned a sex at birth and identify with a diferent gender identity.

The 'I' in the LGBTQIA+ Rainbow acronym is often not well-known. Very few members of the intersex community here in Aotearoa (New Zealand) feel comfortable being 'out' as intersex, due to a sense of being outliers who hold shameful and unspeakable identities—often influenced by conversations at diagnosis, like the one I had. Like all people, intersex people have diverse sexualities and gender identities, and many self-identify as members of the Rainbow community. To me, an intersex presence in the Rainbow acronym reflects the collective stand we take each day as a group of marginalised and under-represented people, wishing to stand up and fight for our basic human rights alongside other members of the Rainbow community facing similar challenges.

As a lesbian and intersex woman, I have faced two separate 'coming out' events. Both of these situations have challenged ideas of what many people in society stereotypically perceive to be a "normal woman".

Our Rainbow community sits within a beautifully diverse spectrum of sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics.

We are more than pink.

We are more than blue.

Let's not forget that.

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salient.org.nz/2019/07/beyond-pink-and-blue/


COMING OUT
OF THE
SHADOWS
NEVER FELT
SO GOOD

Out of the shadows

MIM HALL

I knew as a kid I was different and I had this perception it wasn't in a good way. When I was 12, I found out the name of what made me different. My parents told me I had 17 beta hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase deficiency. What the fuck is that? As a 12-year-old I was like—what the fuck? My parents told me this was extremely rare and almost no one has it. So essentially, in my head, I was alone. I was also told to keep this a secret and not tell anyone. Not with my friends, or my siblings. I remember rehearsing lies I should say if anyone asked a nosy question. I just put this complex ball of words into a corner and tried to forget about it. But then, mid last year, I got lost in the Youtube maze and stumbled on this video by Emily Quinn, an amazing queer activist—she has a whole Youtube channel dedicated to her weird and unusual challenges and experiences; and I was like, hey, I've had these weird and unusual experiences too! And that was the first time I connected the dots and found out that I was intersex, and I learnt that 17 beta hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase deficiency is actually one of over 40 intersex variations.

For many I can imagine this would be something difficult to come to terms with and many may find it hard to understand. But for me, it came as a relief—an answer to the question I was too scared and confused to ask. With the help of other intersex activists, like Pidgeon Pagonis, River Gallo, Hanne Gaby Odiele and Hans Lindahl, I learnt that being intersex was something not to be ashamed of, that it was not unnatural or disgusting, and that I should be proud of who I am.

In the queer community, when an individual openly expresses their gender or sexual identity, it is often known as coming out of the closet. For the intersex community, I like to think of it as coming out of the shadows. We exist, and have always existed, and a veil of shame and shadow has been put over us for too long. I believe that it is time that we cast a light on the human violations that are happening in our community. I think society needs to see us and understand and accept that we exist outside of the binaries they have created. I was scared about expressing who I am, worried about the potential bullying, harassment and discrimination I would be making myself vulnerable to. But now that people can see me, and I can see myself, I feel so much more… me. I can honestly say, coming out of the shadows has never felt so good.

Loving an intersex person

DIANA RENTERÍA

Kaleb has been my partner for more than six years and is a person who was born with an intersex body.

Since we met, she has always been honest with me. She told me that her body didn't fit within the social idea of a typical woman. I didn't understand at that time. She told me that she was afraid. She thought it was possible that I would abandon her as soon as I realised that. What was the difference?

Believe it or not, my answer was: "What is 'being a woman' in these times?" I wasn't discouraged by this. Honestly, I love androgynous people. I love Erika Linder, Tina Jittaela, among other androgynous-looking girls. Kaleb fit what I love. The softness with which she takes me in her arms, the rudeness with which she defends me when someone hurts me, the courage to face an unknown world in which she often suffers rejection and discrimination for not conforming to the idea that many people have of what should be a "woman".

You see, since I met her, she has always moved between female and male. Her physical appearance is very androgynous, and at first glance many people find it difficult to know her gender.

She has physical characteristics considered male like wide shoulders, a beard and abundant body hair, but also has physical characteristics considered female, such as breasts and a high voice. She also has other variations in sex characteristics that can only be known in intimacy. She even sometimes uses male pronouns to refer to herself and that never bothered me. Quite the opposite, I understood and liked to play with pronouns.

Over time, we became closer and closer to the point of knowing enough secrets of each other.

I must clarify that this is not a cheesy love story. It wasn't since the beginning and it's more than something sweet and lovely. It was a journey of self-knowledge for both, walking hand in hand with the person you love most. It wasn't easy to discover who she was because she has always been repressed. All her life she carried the stigma of "you are not normal". But what is normal? It was a question we asked ourselves frequently. "Normal is what is accepted in one place, but it isn't in another place," we arrived at that conclusion as we travelled this journey together.

What was it that she was ashamed of? The abundant beard she has? Please! I thought her beard was so beautiful! Was it the hair that covered her entire body? I love it! It's like having a teddy bear: cuddly, cute, somewhat grumpy, but always with me.

Her pride was her strength. I feel protected with her by my side. I didn't care how many times she broke things, she just couldn't control her temper. But with time and patience she managed to control it sometimes.

She didn't know why her physical appearance was different from other women. This was something she constantly questioned and caused her discomfort. So, one day I said: "I'm tired of trying to fit in to this society! Let's just be together without wanting to fit in. The truth is humanity is diverse and multicultural. Just as the Japanese are tired of being compared to the Chinese, we must not compare ourselves with anyone else!" She laughed at my silly comment, but I know it helped her, and together we moved on with our journey. I supported her in her search to discover what made her so different from other people. She believed that by discovering the whole truth, this would be a reason for me to leave her, but it wasn't. On the contrary, I really want to be with her.

Those who work to "cure" people from "diseases" have enormous prejudices towards the diversity of human bodies, and their opinions and prejudices increased my curiosity. To seek more. To understand. Not to stay only with their opinions but to continue in the search for a second or third opinion and other sources of information. And here it was that our journey began to have a direction. To clear those clouds that were often presented to us, to fight for visibility in all possible places, not to be victims but to show that despite our differences we are all human beings. We didn't learn this in a good way – we learned it badly, with falls, climbs and fights.

You might think that by having a partner with an intersex body and with a non-binary identity I am idealising it, but it is not so. All human beings have good things but also bad things. Due to the insecurity and repression she had experienced all her life, in addition to poorly managed hormonal treatments, Kaleb began to become someone who I couldn't even recognise. She felt so much sadness and anger. Her past experiences created a being with fears and insecurities and I know that no matter how hard I try to support her to feel better and change, those demons will stay there.

Repression? We live in a society where two women cannot be together without experiencing discrimination, much less that someone who is intersex can be accepted to exist. They are silenced by medical institutions trying to "fix" their bodies from birth, removing in childhood the parts that they think are in the way of upholding the perfect standard.

I don't deny that her past experiences somehow can justify Kaleb's anxiety attacks, as well as the insecurity or jealousy she came to feel. As I said, this isn't a cheesy love story, this is real. This is what real people are, many of us have been hurt, and we act in different ways because of those wounds.

Kaleb and I are together for a reason but our relationship has never been like the typical love stories you see in the movies. However, here we are, telling the world that you can love and you can be loved. You can accept and love another person with all their faults. No matter if your loved one lives in another city or if you live together. No matter if you both have wounds.

> "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction."
> - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry


ADVANCED BODY TECHNOLOGY
intersex

Here I am

ELISE NYHUIS

I grew up amongst those who spoke in the voices of angels, yet my body was a fantasy. A conjuring of nature, an abrupt reminder of the dissonance of thought which dominates the chosen.

I am intersex.

The sun beat its own inevitable paradiddle upon my eyelids, a reminder of the corporeal nature of my body. My mum hurried towards the car: a utopia of normalcy in a concrete structure of ordered confusion.

I remember her panicked look a moment ago, the pastel jaundiced yellow walls of the waiting room, the knowing clinical smile of an adult who knew my body better than the person inhabiting it.

Every six months this inexorable rigmarole was a reminder of the provocative nature of my 12-yearold self.

The blissful primordial epoch of my childhood was at an abrupt end. I had never been so aware of my abject physical failings, so aware of my apparent gender.

This gender only made aware on an observation table, behind closed doors.

My gender must be a temporary thing as transparent and fleeting as the disposal paper which hid my body from the lino covering of its temporal holding.

I remember the paralysis of acceptance of a consent already given, a consent which was not said but given by my atypical existence.

I am one not many—here I am.

(In)tersex

ITSH

I am caught in between, or rather, I exist there comfortably.
Wedged in, or rather, nestled, right where I was born.
Some don’t see me as whole.

Others see me as a hole—in their ideology.
I break the factory flow.
When it’s time to sort me they can’t find where I go.
Gender is energy. Not created or destroyed.
Just felt.

No, I am not lost.

Truth is, my body can’t be mapped.
I remain the compass and the needle.

Witness the North suffocating the South.

I am a collection of poems that have yet to read themselves.
I am an unchecked box, I am doubts invitation.
I am an uncomfortable truth at an unbearable volume.

I am.

You and I

MEERDERWÖRTER

What is privilege? Privilege is when a certain aspect of your life will make sure you are not discriminated against—in this specific case, I want to show you how intersex people, my people, I, have been and are institutionally discriminated against.

I came up with this idea after I read an article from Lori Lakin Hutcherson, "My white friend asked me to explain white privilege, so I decided to be honest". I too, want to explain to my friends and acquaintances a few ways in which you benefit from endosex (non-intersex) privilege.

1. I was not aware of how my body would develop

Sex education in school? I get that everyone feels uneasy about it, I mean, they're called our privates for a reason. But for me? It was horror. I remember having to watch a documentary on all that stuff—and deep inside me I felt panic rising, I could feel how I got more and more stressed out—yet I had to remain sitting there and endure it. I was facing down at the table, I wish I could have pressed my hands to my ears so I would not have understood what was said. This was in middle school, and while others joked about it, I was horrified. To me, it felt like someone was telling me very, very bad news. I couldn't joke around about it. I was in shock. And the worst part? I didn't even know why. Only years later would I piece the bits and pieces together and come to the conclusion, that deep inside of me, I was triggered when I was confronted with this material again after my castration in my very young years.

2. I did not have the language to talk about my body and my experiences

I didn't have the language around being intersex until I was 16. I'm only in my early 20s now. I didn't even know I was intersex until I was 16. How do you navigate a world when you don't know who you are, when you always have this sore spot, but no way to talk about it? Now, as I write this, I know what Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) and gonads mean—how can you communicate if you don't even know this language? I started pouring over the internet when I was 17 and 18, learning as much as I could in as little time as possible. There was such a need inside myself, a thirst I had to learn about myself and my community. I had to fill this void that was increasingly growing as I got older and older. I found there were more and more things I needed to talk about, but I didn't have the language for. The years that followed were filled with confusion and a search for community, along with learning my own history and learning about the atrocities my community face. This isn't something that happens once a year somewhere in a country we deem "uncivilised", this is happening in our own backyard, every day. It took me a whole semester of winter depression, where I dragged myself to classes just to be present physically, and hours of talking to friends that I could slowly accept what was done to me. Done to me—not happened. Because there was intent and action, it didn't just "happen". "Mutilation", "human rights violation", "torture", were just a few of the words I had to wrap my head around. It's one thing to know things have happened to you. It's another thing to realise they have been done to you.

3. I have to rely on hormone replacement therapy—for life

Sex hormones do many more things than just regulate your sex drive or ovulation—they are also responsible for bone density and without them you're at high risk of osteoporosis. This means everyone really needs hormones and when your gonads are taken out you need to get them some other way. Many of you, I know, are taking the pill, or have done so at some point in your life. But now imagine that you wouldn't have a choice but to take it every single day, starting when you're 14, being told you have to take it for the rest of your life. You might change the way you get those hormones—you can take them orally as pills, or you might get shots every few weeks—but no matter the method, you know that because of the decision of other people, you have to do this for the rest of your life.

4. I am constantly gaslighted by mental health professionals

Imagine being a transgender person and going to the mental health professional you have been directed to for help (since many places still require this) and you go to seek help to become who you know you are—only to be told that intersex people are incapable of having gender dysphoria. Imagine being told by a mental health professional that your past abuse wasn't as bad as you remembered. Of course a doctor wouldn't have tied you down as a child, they say. But you know the doctor is going to say this because you've been in therapy and you know the game. So, you pull out the pictures that are undeniably you and lay them silently on the table before leaving the room to gather yourself before you yell at the person who was supposed to help you. The person you're paying $120 an hour to who just denied you care. And you wish you could make them understand. Instead, you leave them with pictures, silence, unease and distrust. But you'll return. You'll return to educate them, hoping, at least, that they will listen to the next intersex person who sees them.

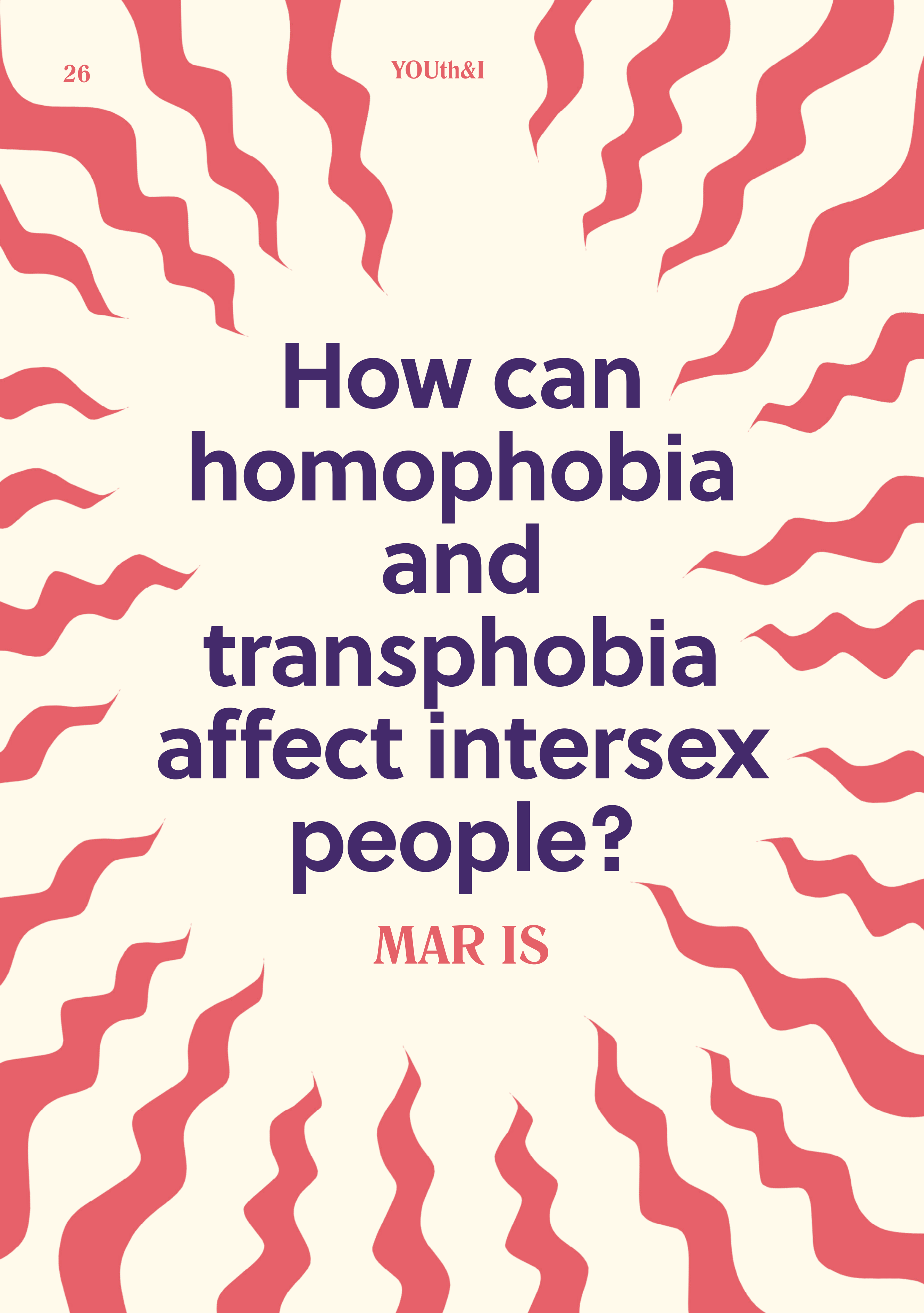
5. We are not heard

22 years, that's how long we've been shouting for change. It's why there is Intersex Awareness Day on October 26th. Because on October 26th, 1996, that is when for the first time, intersex people protested against the torture that we are subjected to. Why has so little changed in those 22 years? Why did I still have to hear a speech at Pride about how doctors tried to pressure a mother into consenting to surgery for her child. A child. This child is ours, and we will protect them. We will make sure they can grow up to become the person they are meant to be, old enough to make their own decisions about their own body. We will fight for this child, so that they have their human rights protected. 22 years. I do not want to see another generation growing up having to face what we have had to face. I do not want to go to a meeting in another 22 years and have to hear the same stories from the young ones again. I do not want to think about how many more of my intersex siblings have died by suicide in another 22 years. I too was thinking about it, that the world is better without me. Sometimes I feel completely invisible. Thankfully I was fortunate enough to find my intersex family.

As the saying goes:
Change your hearts, not our parts.

This is dedicated to my intersex family. You're not alone. We're in this together and we will make change.


“I realised that this was something I wanted to do for me.”
intersex
Bitch on heat



How can homophobia and transphobia affect intersex people?

MAR IS

Although I have never identified with any of the letters in the LGBT acronym, I feel deep empathy and love for this community. I understand the problems and discrimination they face, since every day I face those same problems and discrimination.

I was born in a small rural community in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. I was born at home and I was assigned female without many questions. When I reached puberty, my body developed characteristics considered male, such as body hair considered excessive for a woman, a beard, broad shoulders, my hips and breast didn't develop, etc. In other words, I was born with an intersex body, one with congenital sex characteristics that don't seem to fit the typical definitions of male or female, and my appearance is androgynous.

Some people perceive me as a man, some as a woman, and some people feel confused about my gender. It all depends on people's prejudices. But the problem is not how they perceive me, the real problem is how these people act on their perceptions and prejudices. Allow me to share some examples.

When I was a teenager, I was criticised for my tone of voice (considered male at the time) and for my way of being and physical appearance, which was considered "masculine". Often the criticisms came from my siblings and my mother.

At 18, when my body had fully developed, I had a lot of beard and body hair. I had to shave all the time. At that time, I used long hair, makeup and clothes considered feminine. People discriminated against me because they perceived me as a trans woman—there is nothing wrong with being a trans woman—but society is cruel to people who don't fit their ideas of what a woman should be. I received a lot of psychological violence, some people harassed and bothered me, but the worst violence I suffered was from some boyfriends I had at the time who frequently made derogatory comments about my appearance.

Due to these and other situations, at 25 I decided to cut my hair. I cut it on impulse until it was very short. I stopped using makeup and started wearing unisex clothes. Then, I began to receive another kind of discrimination, since some people perceived me as a lesbian (although I have never identified myself like this) and other people perceived me as a gay man and made many homophobic comments. If some heterosexual woman or gay man felt attracted to me and then realised I wasn't a man, sometimes they reacted with violence.

Sometimes, when I let my beard grow a little, people asked me: "Are you a trans man?" or "If you are a woman, why do you have a beard?" At that time, I lived in a city that was a bit more tolerant with diversity and I lied, saying that I was under hormonal treatment with testosterone, because I didn't want people to know that I had a natural beard. I felt more confident saying that I had decided to have a beard.

Almost all the doctors I have consulted because of health problems that had nothing to do with my sex characteristics have sought to "help me" by offering hormonal treatments that I have not requested, or they have referred me to an endocrinologist who, according to them, will "help me discover" what will happen to my body if they give me hormonal treatment which will make me look more feminine. I have always refused this kind of "help". Some doctors have been invasive and insistent, and I have made it clear that I'm not interested in their treatments. On the other hand, there are other doctors who apparently have a sincere intention to help, but they simply don't know that variations in sex characteristics are not a pathology, and they get carried away by what they learned in medical school.

In the course of my life I have experienced psychological violence and sometimes physical violence, all as a result of the misperception about my gender identity or sexual orientation, and because of the social prejudices that exist against every person perceived as non-heterosexual or non-cisgender.

Although I don't belong to the LGBT community, I feel empathy for the people of this community, because I know that all forms of discrimination and violence are horrible, since I have had to live this in my own flesh.

I face all these situations in the way I consider most appropriate. I try never to put myself at risk and I don't harm or hate those who attack me. It's an internal struggle that sometimes takes away my energy and doesn't allow me to focus on my daily tasks, such as at work or school.

However, because I was born with a body that is not typical, I had the opportunity to meet a beautiful being. I talk about my girlfriend who is also an intersex person, and I have also met other intersex people who are admirable, strong, brave. All of them inspire me to keep going day by day. They are my true family.

Since I met the intersex community my life changed completely. Now I'm a more emotionally stable person, and I feel happy and satisfied with my life. My girlfriend has helped me a lot with this.

Sometimes I forget what my life was before I found this beautiful community. I forget how alone I felt and I begin to sabotage myself with negative thoughts—but then I remember the past and stop my inner dialogue; I go back to concentrate on the present and enjoy what I now have and never thought to have: a true family.

decisions

ITSH

Fractured decisions

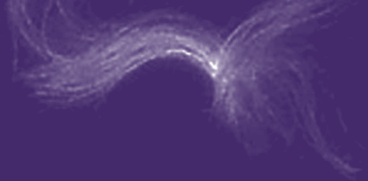
ITSH

I twirl my hair like I’m making candy.
I pull it out like I’m made of metaphors.
I’m biting your tongue.
You’re biding my time.
Years of miscommunication, disparate conversation.
I down another disappointment and build another boundary
for greedy hands to push and for me to cower behind.
I’ve tried standing in, standing out and standing up but my legs give way.
Give me a break or a sentence.
A minute or repentance.
I have sixteen eyes but terrible vision.
Twenty shaky hands that can’t put keys in the ignition.
Billions of lines that somehow struggle with division.
And six brains that can’t make a single decision.

Fractured decisions

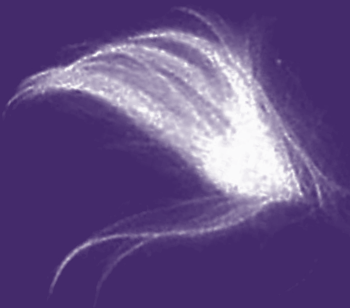
ITSH

Fractured



In 2016, in the family court case Re: Carla (Medical procedure) [2016] FamCA 7, a judge in Queensland, Australia allowed for the sterilisation of a 5-year-old girl, Carla (not her real name), based on gender stereotypes and erroneous medical information. The judge further ruled that Court authorisation was not necessary for such procedures, condoned medically unnecessary surgeries undertaken two years prior that 'enhanced the appearance of her female genitalia', and failed to recognise the investment of her clinicians and parents in the reinforcement of Carla's gender following those previous surgeries.

Carla



STEPH LUM

Once, when I was a kid, I told my parents I wanted to cut my hair
Cut off the long blond hair tied in braid
Keep it short

People will think you're a boy.
You look nice with long hair.
You don't want short hair.

They've always been so sure
as long as I remember
they've been scared

One time, we went for a walk in a forest
I wandered off, got really lost. I thought they'd be so upset with me
Pink skirt torn, flower pattern covered with dirt
Took ages to find my parents again but then when I did
they thought I'd been with them the whole time.
Didn't even notice what I'd done to my clothes.

I think they were scared because they were lost too
Or were they scared of me?

My parents think that to be a girl you have to look a certain way
They say it's for the best, that I'll understand
One day

My parents always try to think ahead
They imagine things that might happen, and then do things to stop the things that might
I've never been so good
Sometimes, I try and imagine the future they imagine for me
but I always just end up lost, back in the forest

I find it hard to imagine because I know that to be a woman
you don't have to look a certain way
I think they know that too but they're scared
of the power of the woman who looks different and is comfortable with herself

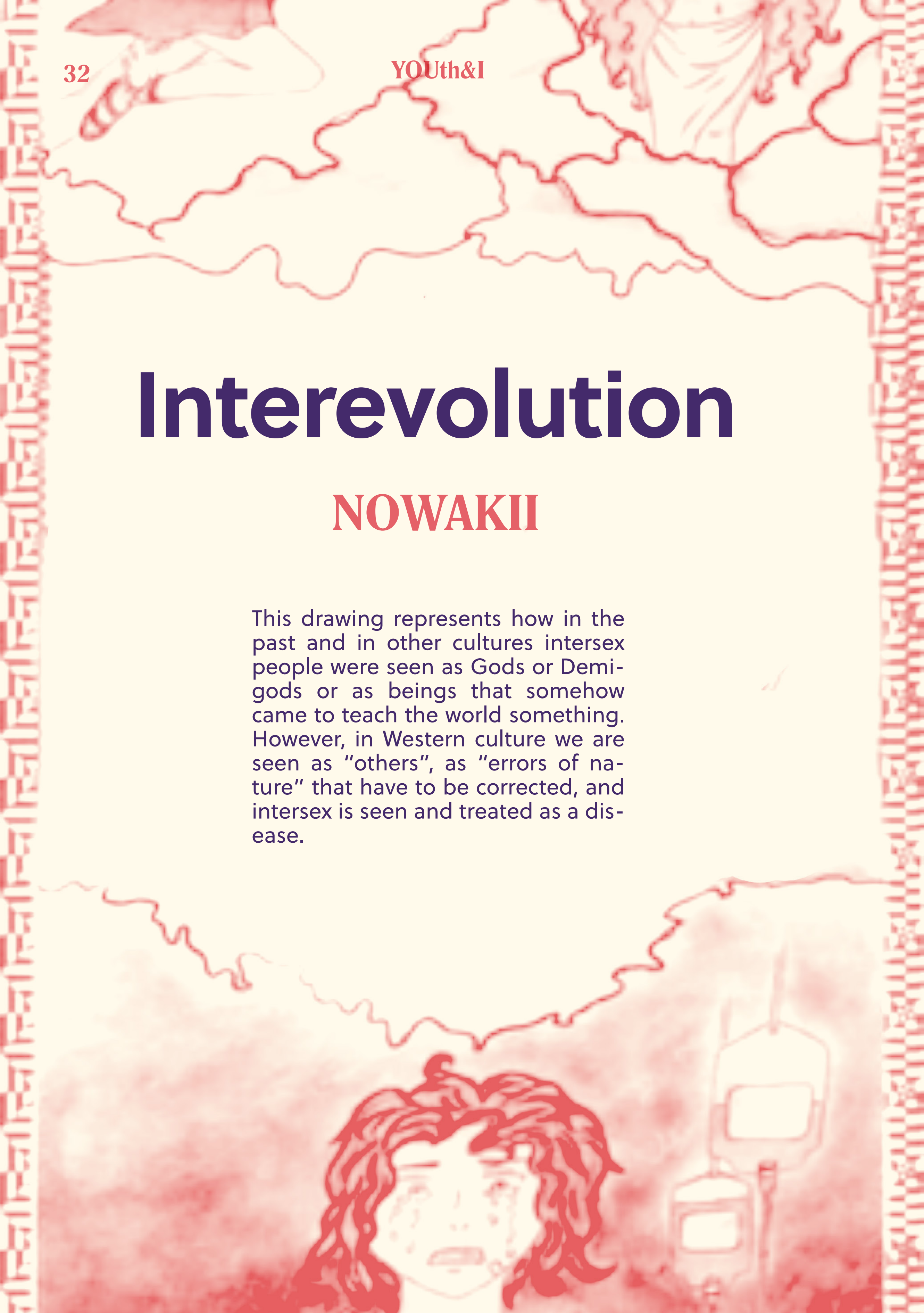
So they never told me that
A woman isn't the parts of her body but the strength inside her

Instead they told me that
This is what you'll want, one day

One day
I cut my hair
Cut off the long blond hair tied in braid
Kept it short

Told my parents

If I change my mind
At least my hair will grow back
One day



Interevolution

NOWAKII

This drawing represents how in the past and in other cultures intersex people were seen as Gods or Demigods or as beings that somehow came to teach the world something. However, in Western culture we are seen as "others", as "errors of nature" that have to be corrected, and intersex is seen and treated as a disease.

CAH and I: a prisoner of puberty and early menopause

An eternal, toxic, and love relationship with my body

FRIDA

Hi! My name is Frida. I am a girl from Oaxaca, Mexico, but I am not a typical girl. I am different; I have something that makes me special, something that has made me happy: I have Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia or CAH. However, not everything has been happy in my life; I have been through different difficult situations. Let me tell you a little of what I have experienced: puberty and menopause.

It feels like the third time, or maybe the fourth, I've gone through puberty. I've lost count!

The first time happened when I was about two or three years old. I looked like a typical girl, but, suddenly, the change started: I went into early puberty, but it wasn't the typical puberty a female goes through, it was more like a male puberty. I started getting hair all over my body: pubic hair, beard, moustache, hair on my legs and arms, etc. By the time I was in kindergarten, I was the tallest pupil in the school, my clitoris started to grow, my genitals became ambiguous and I started to get acne.

I had no choice over how my body would develop. My parents noticed the changes in my body and took me to the hospital but I didn't get any medication and I didn't receive any treatment. My parents didn't take me to the hospital again because the endocrinologist had said that what was happening to me was something "normal" and typical. At the time I thought—what?! Was everything really okay with my body? I became an aggressive person because of the excessive amount of androgens in my body—the result of not receiving any medical treatment.

Childhood and 'adolescence' (3 to 15 years old) were hard for me. I always knew I wasn't like the other girls. I always knew I was different, and, sometimes, I believed that I was a girl in a male body. My older sister used to make fun of me because I didn't look like a girl. She used to say that I was ugly, I had a man's voice and a man's body. My classmates and neighbours didn't say anything to me about my physical appearance, but I always knew the rumours they said about me. And while all the girls in my school were going through puberty and developing feminine characteristics, I felt uncomfortable because I was still the same person and increasingly getting more of a typically male appearance.

When I was 15, I asked my parents to take me to a specialist. I needed to know what had been happening to me and I didn't feel good about my body—maybe because of the comments my sister used to make about me. I remember that my parents took me to the hospital and three paediatricians checked me. One of them told me that I wasn't normal, he kept saying "you aren't a boy or a girl, you aren't normal. You are abnormal, you have both sexes". Those words hit me so hard and made me fall into depression.

A few months later, my parents took me to an endocrinologist, who checked me and determined the diagnosis: I had CAH—Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. It was difficult for me at the beginning. I needed someone to talk to about my condition but, when I wanted to talk to my parents, they didn't listen to me and always told me not to tell anyone about CAH, not even my sisters. All I wanted was to talk to someone about my feelings but it seemed to be a forbidden topic.

I started the medical treatment with cortisol, antiandrogens and female hormones, so it was like going into puberty again, but "the right way" for me: a female puberty. I experienced a typical female puberty: breast development, my first period, etc. I became more sensitive, I used to cry all the time and for every insignificant reason—maybe it was an effect caused by the hormones. Nevertheless, I felt happy because I started to look like a more typical girl and I wasn't virilised anymore.

After doing a lot of thinking, I realised that being intersex didn't make me abnormal, but it made me different from what is typical. It made me special. Nevertheless, I felt happy about looking like a typical girl and I still feel happy. I've always identified more as a girl than as a boy and wanted to look this way.

Four years later, I decided to stop the hormonal medication. I wanted to see if my ovaries worked without it but they didn't. My breasts shrunk and sweating increased. Even though I was still taking the antiandrogens I thought that I was getting slightly virilised again, but it wasn't noticeable. Maybe the virilisation was only in my mind.

A few months later, my body started to produce female hormones by itself. I was experiencing puberty again, I guess! My breasts started to develop once again, my hips widened a little bit, and my period came back. I was really happy because my ovaries worked and I didn't have to take hormones to have all the pubertal changes a typical girl would have.

I felt really good with my body but it didn't last long. Almost a year later, my ovary function declined and I began to experience some of the changes most women have during menopause: decalcification, hot flashes, trouble sleeping, breast shrinkage—again—and suddenly my period became irregular until it stopped.

I talked to my doctor and, after some blood tests, she told me that my ovaries didn't work well and I should restart hormonal medication. She explained to me that the lack of female hormones was causing decalcification and it could also lead to cancer.

Now, I am 23. I take hormones and I'm experiencing puberty again. It's a little bit stressful to deal with it—it's puberty again! What a pity! Acne and changes of mood again—I don't like puberty, but I'm conscious that if I stop taking hormones I will go into menopause.

I'm a prisoner of puberty and menopause. What can I do? I don't know, I think there's nothing to do. Don't confuse what I say—this experience doesn't make me feel uncomfortable or sad. I'm happy with myself and I'm proud to be intersex. Every intersex person I've met, every good, difficult or bad experience I've gone through, and every good or bad comment people have made about my past and present physical appearance has moulded me to become the strong and comprehensive person that I am.

The advocate's badge collection
Photo credit: Irene Kuzemko

This page and top of next: Badges made at the Intersex Peer Support Australia retreat, 2019
Photo Credit: Gabriel Filpi, Bonnie Hart and Mani Mitchell

Badge collection
Photo credit: Cody Smith

Intersex heroes Phoebe Hart and Bonnie Hart
Photo credit: Jelly O'Shea

Amanda, Trần, Gopi, Georgia and Irene speaking on an intersex youth activist panel at the ILGA World conference —Wellington, New Zealand, March 2019
Photo credit: Jelly O'Shea and Trần Phong

Georgia and Jelly at the Global Feminist LBQ Women's conference —Cape Town, South Africa, July 2019
Photo credit: Irene Kuzemko

Pidge, Steph, Cody, Mim and Helena at intersex advocate Pidge Pagonis' talk —Canberra, Australia, August 2019
Photo credit: Joel Radcliffe

Take a breath

BANTI JASWAL

It was the day of my talk and my body was calm. I had three hours before my talk and the nerves had not sunk in yet. This was a pretty common occurrence; the last time I talked about being intersex was on a panel at an intersex conference. That wasn't even the first time. I spoke about intersex before when I was younger on a panel talking to doctors. Every time I've spoken to a crowd of people I would feel fine before it was my time to share. It is very nice to have this calm feeling, but it is the calm before the storm. Once I'm up there my anxiety takes control and drives my nerves higher and higher. During each trip, I always tough it out, and according to other people I do a fantastic job. However, this was before my talk and it was my time to enjoy what other presenters had prepared. The conference was all about educating LGBTQIA+ people and allies so my presentation fit right into the umbrella term. After the first talk I attended, my nerves started flowing. Thoughts such as no one is going to show up to my workshop kept appearing. Everyone in the room seemed to know a great deal about LGBTQIA+ issues.

After the morning presentation, I attended lunch with a twisting stomach. I sat with some girls I didn't really know and saw familiar faces of people I did not talk to. All these factors made me ditch my lunch to find my mum and leave early to set up my room. Everything I needed was in place and in my head. My shaking hand gave out pamphlets and logged into the computer. I grabbed my notes and put them on a music stand to glance at in case of emergency. I looked out at the circle of desks and in the center saw my mum.

“You got this dear! I’m so proud of you, you’re being so brave,” she said, with a big smile radiating her love and support.

My nerve-struck arms flailed frantically to take her words in. I started taking deep breaths again, each breath a strong memory. The first breath, coming out as intersex to my best friend. Breath two, telling my family I am pansexual. Breath three, holding my friends and family who love me for who I am. Breath four, my girlfriend who supports me and is proud of me. With each breath, I refocused and allowed each thought to sink deeper in me. With the fifth breath, I reached inside to a locked scroll pushed to the side, labelled “My Intersex Story”. With my final breath, I opened my eyes and people started to file in.

Inside I felt myself clutching to my story but the time was getting closer, and it was time for me to unravel the scroll. The room was filled. Every seat was taken; some people were even standing. All these people were here to hear me, I thought with a shudder. I saw the faces of both my mums and some family friends smiling at me in the crowd. Looking again, I spied all my acquaintances and all the other people I didn’t know. I reached for the clicker which was cool against my burning hands. With this, I started and the presentation began.

Slide by slide went by in a flash. By the end of the talk, I felt as if I had been winded. All the shock of letting my story be out there overflowed my system. The adrenalin started to fade and people were coming up to congratulate me and ask questions. Some people told me how much they learned, while others said how much they appreciated me being so open and knowledgeable, and I even got offered to do another talk.

Presenting is hard and telling your story might be even harder. I feel that, like many things, practice makes perfect. I believe that knowing that the people who love you are there for you helps make life choices easier. You know yourself and you know the topic. The best thing to do when you get up there is to be your authentic self. Nerves might be overwhelming but it is about you taking the time you need to prepare. There might be people who don’t understand you or disagree with you, but you know what is true for you. Remember to take deep breaths and remember you can do anything. You are your own limit.

My Intersex Story

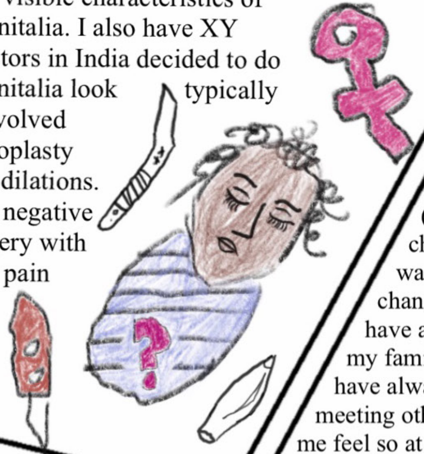
Who I am

Banti

Intersex
Condition
SF-1 gene
variation
Advocate
Almost 18
LGBTQIA+
Queer
Pansexual
Indian/
American

They/Them
Pronouns
XY chromosomes

When I was born I had visible characteristics of intersex traits in my genitalia. I also have XY chromosomes. The doctors in India decided to do surgery to make my genitalia look typically female. The surgery involved clitoroplasty and vaginoplasty followed by a series of dilations. Today I experience the negative side effects of this surgery with soreness and a stinging pain between my legs and I have PTSD-type responses in medical settings.



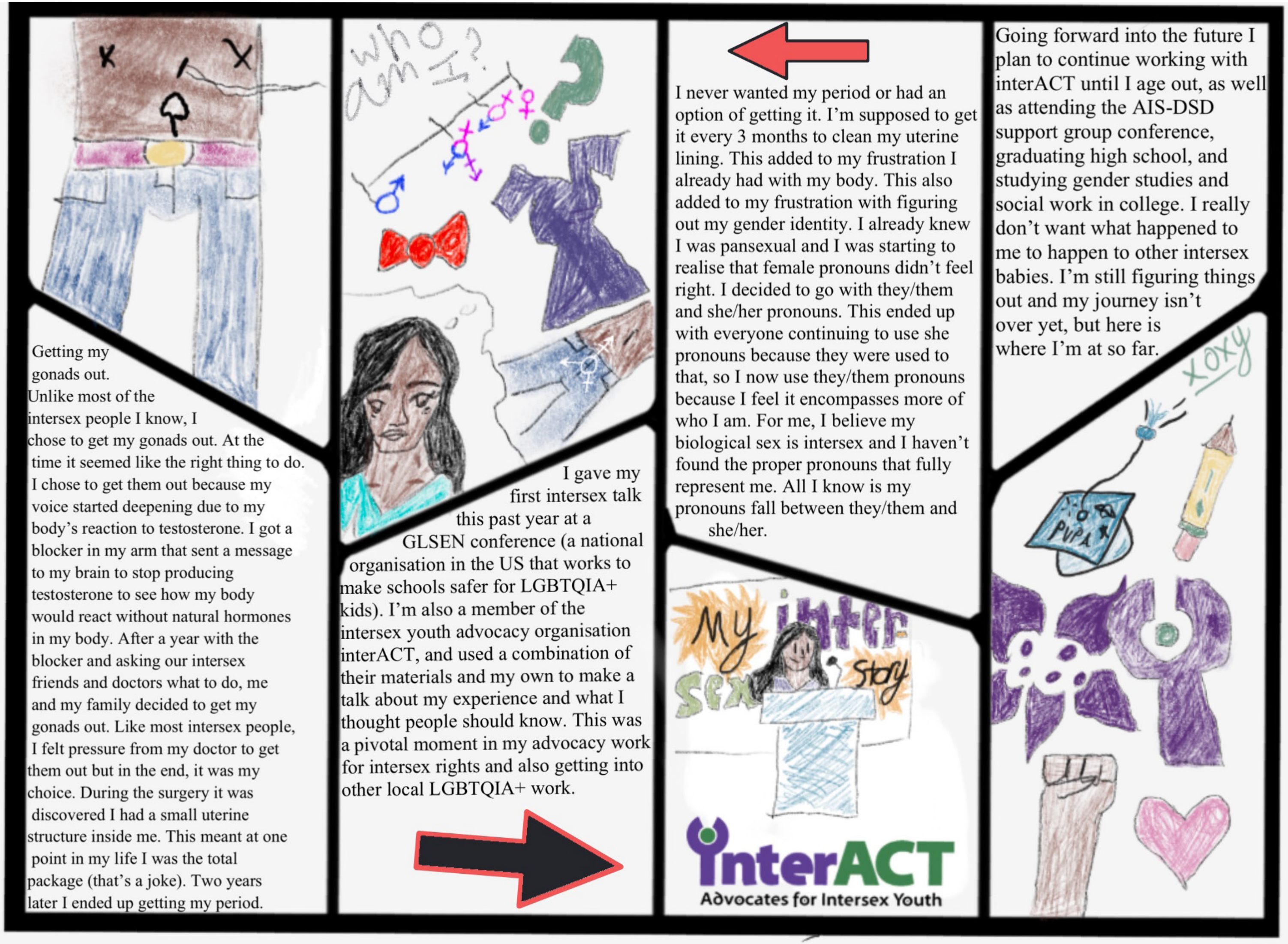
AIS DSD Support Group

I went to my first AIS-DSD Support Group (the name is in the process of changing) conference when I was about 10 years old and it changed my life forever. I do have a person really close to me in my family who is also intersex. They have always been in my life but meeting other people of all ages made me feel so at home. At my first conference, there was no one else my age, but I was still able to build connections with the teens and adults who were there. I learned other people's stories and had fun playing games amongst other things. I keep in touch with everyone at the conference. My orchid family (what we call ourselves in the support group) has helped me make decisions about my body and support me through my journey. The next year, I met two girls my age and we keep in contact all the time. I love how I keep seeing the youth attendance grow. Now more young kids who are the age I was at my first conference have community.

growing up

I was adopted at the age of 2 from India and met my two mums and moved to America. I was raised female and always knew I was intersex. This did not really affect me until my friends started going through puberty and then I began to understand how my body was different. I was always kind of a tomboy and liked pirates and monster high dolls.

Still growing



Getting my gonads out.

Unlike most of the intersex people I know, I chose to get my gonads out. At the time it seemed like the right thing to do. I chose to get them out because my voice started deepening due to my body's reaction to testosterone. I got a blocker in my arm that sent a message to my brain to stop producing testosterone to see how my body would react without natural hormones in my body. After a year with the blocker and asking our intersex friends and doctors what to do, me and my family decided to get my gonads out. Like most intersex people, I felt pressure from my doctor to get them out but in the end, it was my choice. During the surgery it was discovered I had a small uterine structure inside me. This meant at one point in my life I was the total package (that's a joke). Two years later I ended up getting my period.

I gave my first intersex talk this past year at a GLSEN conference (a national organisation in the US that works to make schools safer for LGBTQIA+ kids). I'm also a member of the intersex youth advocacy organisation interACT, and used a combination of their materials and my own to make a talk about my experience and what I thought people should know. This was a pivotal moment in my advocacy work for intersex rights and also getting into other local LGBTQIA+ work.

I never wanted my period or had an option of getting it. I'm supposed to get it every 3 months to clean my uterine lining. This added to my frustration I already had with my body. This also added to my frustration with figuring out my gender identity. I already knew I was pansexual and I was starting to realise that female pronouns didn't feel right. I decided to go with they/them and she/her pronouns. This ended up with everyone continuing to use she pronouns because they were used to that, so I now use they/them pronouns because I feel it encompasses more of who I am. For me, I believe my biological sex is intersex and I haven't found the proper pronouns that fully represent me. All I know is my pronouns fall between they/them and she/her.

Going forward into the future I plan to continue working with interACT until I age out, as well as attending the AIS-DSD support group conference, graduating high school, and studying gender studies and social work in college. I really don't want what happened to me to happen to other intersex babies. I'm still figuring things out and my journey isn't over yet, but here is where I'm at so far.

Seven tips for parents of intersex children

LAURA INTER

I am writing this to provide some basic advice for parents of intersex children. But first, I would like to tell you a little about myself. I was born in Mexico City more than 30 years ago. I was born with genital differences—or what doctors call "ambiguous genitalia". Fortunately, I wasn't subjected to "cosmetic" genital surgeries, but I did experience very complicated and humiliating experiences with health professionals.

Over time, these situations led me to look for answers so I would not just be left with the little information and options that doctors gave me. This search led me to create the *Brújula Intersexual* project (an intersex support organisation in Latin America) and, thanks to this, to know the life experiences of many intersex adults. I have also talked with many parents of intersex children.

Due to these interactions, I have noticed the lack of information that exists around intersex issues and so, in order to help parents of intersex children, I share the following tips:

1. Do your own research

Don't stay alone with the information and options provided by doctors. Do your own research, especially on websites and organisations run by intersex people. There you can find a lot of useful information such as guides for parents, stories or testimonies of intersex adults, recommendations of human rights organisations, in addition to a lot of other information that will allow you to have a broader perspective about intersex issues. Information is power.


intersex
KIDS COME FIRST

2. Don't make hasty decisions

If your child's health is not at risk, don't rush to make decisions about surgeries or treatments that can have irreversible and negative con-sequences on your child's physical and mental health. Give yourself time to research and reflect.

3. Don't consent to treatments or surgeries unless your child's life or physical health is at risk

There is no need to perform surgery on a baby's healthy body.

The "cosmetic" or "normalising" genital surgeries that doctors commonly propose to parents, as the name implies, only have the purpose of modifying the appearance so that it fits what is considered a "typically feminine or masculine appearance". However, these surgeries can have important consequences on the physical health of the person and may turn healthy genitalia into one full of health problems. Some of the consequences these surgeries may have are: total or partial loss of sexual sensation, incontinence, lifelong pain, recurrent infections and scars, among other things, depending on the surgical "technique" that the surgeon has used.

Unless your child has an obvious health problem—for example, a blockage in the flow of urine—there is no medical reason to intervene.

It is also common for doctors to perform surgery to remove gonads without evidence of disease, due to a supposed risk of cancer. Many times, this risk is similar, or even less, to the risk of breast cancer. By removing someone's gonads, and thus depriving this person of their natural source of hormones, they are forced to have hormone replacement therapy for life. This may cause other risks such as osteoporosis and premature menopause, among others.

No one should have to undergo "cosmetic", irreversible, medically unnecessary and non- consensual surgery in childhood, when the child is not able to provide their fully informed consent. Every child has the right to grow up with an intact body and to make their own decisions regarding their own body at an age when they can understand the implications that their decisions may have.

4. Always question your doctor about the medical need of the proposed treatments and surgeries

When a doctor proposes surgery or hormonal treatment for your child, always ask the following questions: Is this really necessary? What are the risks? Are there other options? What happens if I don't do anything?

Then investigate on your own the answers to these questions, and if you think necessary, seek a second or third opinion.

Based on the answers and your own research, you can arrive at a conclusion, and, if this is that hormonal treatment or surgery are not medically necessary and can even be risky to the health of your child, then there is no reason to intervene.

5. Be honest with your child

Don't hide information from your child; be open about their intersex variation.

It is important that you teach your child to love their own body as it is. According to their age and understanding, teach your child that there are many ways of being a woman or a man, that all bodies are different from each other and no two bodies that exist look the same. Some bodies may look a little more different than others but there are many other people like them. There is a lot of diversity in nature and that makes the world a wonderful place.

6. Look for peer support groups

It is a good option to look for peer support groups so that both you and your child are in contact with other parents and children and so you don't feel like you are alone. In these groups, you will surely find some people with whom you can be friends, so that you and your child can learn with the support and company of other people who share the same experiences.

7. Allow your child to grow up in a family environment free from prejudice and open to diversity

It is important that your child feels that they can be who they are with their family. Make your home a safe and loving environment, that allows your child to ask questions and allows them to know they live with open-minded people who are welcoming and listen.

Remember that intersex children, like all children, may or may not identify with the gender assigned at birth and, as they grow up, can have any kind of sexual orientation. Let your child know that you love them no matter who they are and whatever they decide for their life. Let your child know that they are growing up in a home that embraces diversity.

I wish

IRENE KUZEMKO

Pro frugal tip: save money on therapy by becoming a famous intersex activist!

Recently I wanted to tell my intersex story to my therapist. Instead of paying for an entire session dedicated to telling my story, I just sent him links to my interviews, and that was it!

On a serious note, I'm so happy to have the opportunity to share my interviews with people instead of having to tell my story for the zillionth time. Just Google me dude, seriously!

In the beginning when I had just discovered I am intersex I wanted to tell my story to everyone. Nowadays I am so tired of telling it. Plus, it's just frustrating that we (intersex people) have to tell our stories all the time in order to "validate" our demands. We have to either experience our pain and trauma over and over again each time we tell our story, or have to completely dissociate ourselves from the story and tell it mechanically without any emotional involvement. I do the latter; I've told my story so many times that I don't even feel anything anymore when telling it. I have even had journalists complain to me that "you're using the same exact words and sentences that you used in your previous interviews", and of course I am, I've told it too many times for it to be different every time.

Another time a news agency wanted to own the rights to my story. I asked, "but would I be able to still give interviews without consulting with you?", and they replied, "yes, but with another story". My response was lol I only have one story, I'm not doing this!

Every time somebody asks me what do I do, it means that I have to give them an entire intersex
101, talk about human rights violations and tell a bit of my story and my activism. I hate lying and I'm happy that I'm able to be open and talk about being intersex to anyone I meet, whether it's an Uber driver, a person in line next to me when

boarding a plane or a random drunk person I started talking to in the club. But it's so exhausting having to explain these things over and over again. I wish one day intersex awareness would come to a level that we won't have to explain to people what intersex is.

Sometimes I feel that our work in my country is invisible, no matter how good our content is and how hard we try, we don't have much reach and have very few allies. I wish more people paid attention to what we are saying and doing.

If you Google intersex in my native language (Russian) most of the results would be interviews with me and my colleagues, and pictures and videos of me. I'm not complaining, but I wish more people in my country spoke about being intersex.

I wish more journalists would educate themselves about intersex before interviewing me. I wish photographers would stop suggesting to me the idea of me "looking very feminine in some shots and looking masculine/androgynous in the others" when taking photos of me to illustrate my interviews.

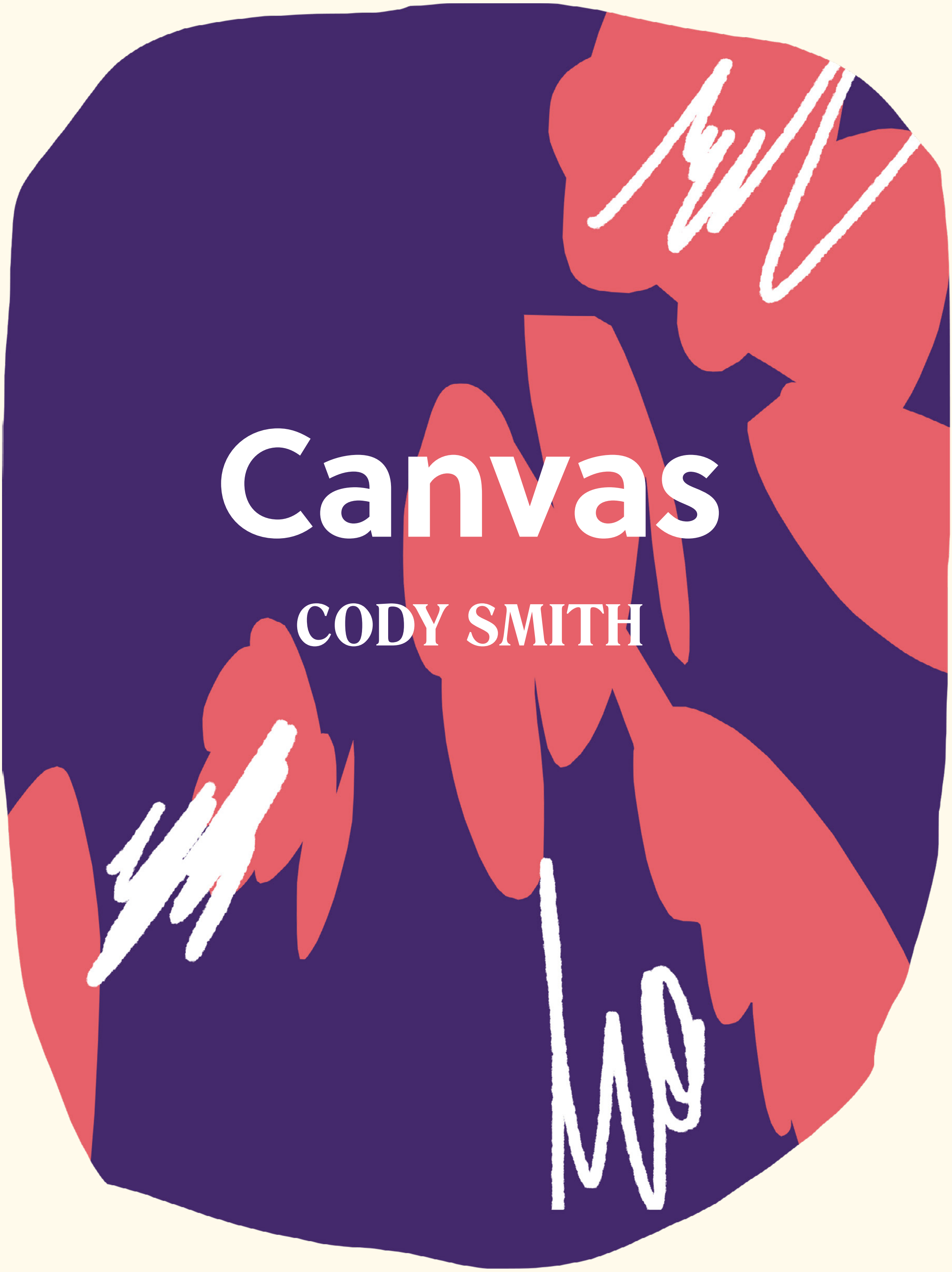
I wish journalists would stop interviewing doctors along with me to put their opinion opposite mine in the same article. I wish more people educated themselves online on intersex issues instead of asking me, "but... what does it look like???" and other inappropriate questions. There are so many resources out there created by me and my incredible colleagues from all over the world. I wish more people actually took the time to educate themselves with those resources, or at least read a Wikipedia article.

I also wish more allies consulted with us before doing something intersex-related. Recently I made this meme and it encapsulates my feelings so well.

There is a popular quote: "Find something you love to do and you'll never have to work a day in your life." I disagree. Intersex activism is my dream job but it is still hard work and it is very tiring. But it still makes me incredibly happy, otherwise I wouldn't be doing it. When a parent tells me that because of what they learned from me they won't allow surgery to be performed on their intersex baby, or when an intersex person I just met hugs me and tells me I'm the first intersex person they've ever met and their eyes sparkle with joy—these moments remind me why am I doing this.

Canvas

CODY SMITH



I am canvas cut in the shape of a woman.
What rainbow of truths I see people paint upon theirs.
Those colours, shapes, and techniques upon mine
Will always be upon canvas
Cut in the shape of a woman.

The doctors knife lies for me.
I never asked it to.

Yellow and purple the colour of bruises.

Scared weird child sitting in the waiting room.
Scars that have never been explained to them.
The adults are talking now. Without you.
Sit silent, read a book.
Surrounded by the misery of sick and suffering children.
Back to school the next day.
Sad and quiet.
I learn myself so late.
That each painting upon my canvas.
Is frustrated, distorted.

Royal and gold the colour of intersex pride.

I am not here to fix my story.
But write a better one.

I sit here with myself and tell each one.
You are loved. You are precious.
There's a place for you here.
Ha! Tell you the truth, I hate doctors too.
You're doing so well. I know it's hard.
I am in awe of what you've survived.
Your fight helps me fight.
You inspire me so much.
Yeah, it's tough. But you have us all here.

Your intersex family.

Right here. For you.

So who cares what's on my canvas?


intersex


Madam Lash
and the
creative
culinaire


SHERA Bitch o'war
All-rounder
Love bazooka
(inter-sexy)
Wheels of equinimity
World @ my feet

Intersexy

ITSH

My body can’t be defined by your binary.
My body says
why the hell do you expect billions of people to fit into two categories?
My body says
I do not “have the best of both worlds.”
I have the best of myself.

I say that my body does not speak for me.
I speak for my body.
My voice is just as loud as your voice.
And I will use it to tell you about the hundreds of thousands of intersex babies
surgically altered to fit into the sex binary.
Born with no ownership of their body.
Doctors would rather cut off parts of us than cut off parts of their misconceptions.
I want to make something perfectly clear to you—the sex binary is a lie.

And I want to make something else perfectly clear too.

I am not just intersex, I am intersexy.

So, if you are interested in getting with me, know you’re not giving me charity.
My body will give you clarity, make it clear that not fitting a binary can be extraordinary.

I am far from ordinary and ordinarily I would refrain from talking so openly about my body,
because my body is *none of your damn business.*
But—I refuse to limit the self-love you see in poetry.
I refuse to let you think for one second that my body deserves any less love than your body.
I refuse to let lies told in medical books make my anatomy my enemy.
If you want to get with me, just say hello, and know

I am intersex
and fucking proud of it.

Orchids

LAURA INTER

I know that the orchid can have other meanings for different intersex people. I personally see the orchid as a symbol of intersex because it's a flower that can have many forms. There is not only one kind of orchid with only one shape, but a great diversity in its shape and colour. Nevertheless, all are called orchids. In the same way, there is not only one kind of intersex body, but a great variability of intersex bodies, very different from each other with different characteristics and yet, all called intersex. In addition, orchids exist throughout the world; they camouflage themselves among other flowers, just as intersex people exist around the world, sometimes camouflaged among the crowd.

The orchids in the photographs have a lot of meaning for me as my partner gave them to me—she is a beautiful intersex person and is one of the most important people in my life. Therefore, I take great care of these orchids, they have been with me for about two years and have come to bloom several times.


Laura Inter

WE ARE CBR

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