

The publication of the

Intersex Society

of North America

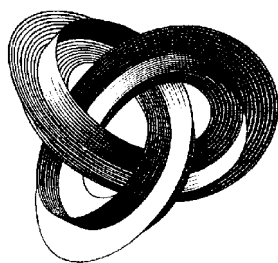
Fall 1997

# Hermaphrodites with *Attitude*

## Intersex Activism Proliferates Worldwide

There's plenty of intersex visibility worldwide these days. Following the lead of ISNA ([www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)), the AIS Support Group has recently created its own web site, at <http://www.med-help.org/www/ais>. Their aim is to reduce the secrecy, stigma, shame and taboo that surround AIS and other intersex states, to encourage psychological support within the medical system, to facilitate peer support, to make accurate information available, and to campaign for improvements in vaginoplasty. The site lists local chapters in the UK, USA, Canada, Netherlands, and Australasia.

"It's OK to be different," says the Intersex Society of New Zealand (<http://nz.com/glb/ISNZ>). Formed in 1996 by Mani Bruce Mitchell, ISNZ has already garnered a torrent of positive print, TV, and radio coverage in New Zealand, and won early converts among medical professionals



specializing in treating intersexuality. ISNZ's logo, reproduced here, represents the complex interconnect-

edness of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual anatomy. In Japan, Hijra Nippon has renamed itself Peer Support for Intersexuals, or

PESFIS, and has issued a book through Kamogawa Press titled *Intersexuals Fight for Life*. PESFIS has obtained considerable visibility in the media, has translated some of ISNA's materials, and has presented the film *Hermaphrodites Speak!* Intersex visibility in Japan increased when the Japanese edition of *Newsweek* reprinted "Gender Limbo," a feature article on activism which had appeared in the May 15 issue in America.

The German TV network RTL carried favorable coverage of intersex activism, interviewing Birgit Reiter of Germany's Workgroup on Violence in Pediatrics and Gynecology and Cheryl Chase of ISNA, as well as urologist Justine Schober, who questioned the wisdom of early surgery.

### Textbooks changing

New editions of textbooks used by mental health and by medical professionals are beginning to appear with coverage of the controversy over treatment of intersexuality. The first was the 1995 *Biological Psychology*, by James Kalat. The 1997 edition of *Sexual Interactions*, by Allegeier and Allegeier, lends support to our fight for visibility, destigmatization, and patient autonomy.

A chapter by pediatric urological surgeon Justine Schober in W.B. Saunders' forthcoming textbook *Pediatric Surgery and Urology: Long Term Outcomes* calls

for reconsideration of timing and necessity of genital surgeries based on realistic long-term outcomes data.

The author of the chapter on disorders of sex differentiation in a nursing text has also taken advantage of ISNA's help to provide a review of professional literature questioning the traditional model of management.

### Media take note of intersex activism

Intersex activism has received favorable attention recently in *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Inside Edition*, Seattle's *Northwest Afternoon* on KOMO TV, *Medical Humanities Report*, *Clinical Psychiatry News*, *Ob.Gyn.News*, *Urology Times*, *Sacramento Evening News* on KOVR TV, and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *the fifth estate*.

Stories are also slated to appear on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* and *All Things Considered*, and in *Redbook*, *Mademoiselle*, *GLQ*, *Hustler*, the *Advocate*, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's *Images*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Midwifery Today*.

### First issue since Winter 95-96!

We regret the long hiatus in publication of *Hermaphrodites with Attitude*. This shorter issue reflects a determination to publish more regularly.

## Intersex People Hidden Behind Potted Plants

*Don Romesburg, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation*

An otherwise excellent September 3 ABC Prime Time Live story entitled "Boy or Girl?" on intersex issues and the debate over medical genital mutilation of intersex children ignored the voices of intersex activists and misrepresented certain key facts. Featuring talking heads of doctors and a mother who had struggled with the decision to have her child surgically made a girl, the story examined "What can happen when doctors are forced to play God," according to Diane Sawyer.

While one researcher who opposed the controversial surgery was represented, a great deal more time was spent with John Gearhart, a pro-surgery advocate who pronounced certain intersex children "boy" or "girl" during a slide presentation. Prime Time Live failed to mention that Gearhart has always refused to engage in a dialogue with intersex activists. In addition, the only adult intersex person Prime Time Live presented was a man who was disguised by a large, floppy hat, dark lighting, a pseudonym and an altered voice. [Editor's note: That individual is in fact not intersexed, but the victim of a botched circumcision. No intersex voices were presented on Prime Time Live.]

"By failing to use footage of openly intersex activists which they had already filmed, Prime Time Live cast the story in a sensational slant reminiscent of the

1967 CBS interview of a shame-filled homosexual hiding behind a potted plant," said ISNA Director Cheryl Chase. In addition, the program failed to note the support resources now available for intersex people. In an ISNA press release, psychologist Dr. Howard Devore added, "It is unconscionable to present this as a problem of merely getting the sex right or wrong. Prime Time did all their viewers a disservice by not informing them of the worldwide network of intersex advocacy organizations and the availability of peer support for the option of a healthy intersex identity."

Please urge Prime Time Live to do a follow-up story to allow intersex people to speak for themselves, openly and honestly, and to place the story in a context which acknowledges the strides made by intersex activists and advocacy groups in the past five years. A transcript of the segment "Boy or Girl" is available at [http://www.abcnews.com/onair/ptl/html\\_files/transcripts/ptl10903d.html](http://www.abcnews.com/onair/ptl/html_files/transcripts/ptl10903d.html).

Contact: Phyllis McGrady, Executive Producer, ABC Primetime Live, 147 Columbus Ave., 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10023, fax: 212.456.1246.

## ISNA gets new digs

In June, ISNA moved its growing operations to downtown San Francisco, making it more convenient for volunteers to work in the office. Our address remains unchanged.

## Ethicists take note

In November, the American Association for Bioethics, the Society for Bioethics Consultation, and the Society for Health and Human Values will hold their joint annual meetings in Baltimore. Included on the program are "Listening to Hermaphrodites: Historical and Ethical Problems in the Medical Treatment of Intersexuality," by Alice Dreger, Ph.D. and "Ethical Analysis of Medical Policies on the Treatment of Neonatal Intersexuals" by Sharon Sytsma Ph.D.

In addition, private discussions with clinical ethicists indicate that some are beginning to take into consideration the points of view expressed by intersex advocates. One ethicist told us that his group had concluded that parents of newborn intersex children ought to be informed of the recommendations of intersex advocacy groups such as ISNA. Meanwhile, we have heard from some parents who say that their surgeon or endocrinologist actively discouraged them from contacting intersex advocacy groups.

## GLBT movement supports intersex activism

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation has been a strong and active supporter of intersex activism, and their assistance has been valuable in obtaining media visibility. An invited feature article by Cheryl Chase will run in the Fall issue of their quarterly magazine, *Images*, which will also appear at their web site, [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org).

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has provided us with important information, contacts, and advice. At NGLTF's invitation, ISNA is participating in a semi-annual National Policy Roundtable. ISNA will also present a panel on intersex activism at NGLTF's Creating Change conference.

The Human Rights Campaign will be including intersex speakers in its Action Week field organizing, helping to increase intersex visibility.

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**Address** letters, submissions, and other correspondence to: ISNA, PO Box 31791, San Francisco, CA 94131. Email <[info@isna.org](mailto:info@isna.org)>.

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## New recommendations published

In October the AMA's *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* published "Commentary: Management of Intersexuality: Guidelines for dealing with persons with ambiguous genitalia," by Milton Diamond and Keith Sigmundson. The article outlines new recommendations which are very much in sympathy with ISNA's. They are expanded to include specific details for which sex to label children born with each type of condition. Diamond and Sigmundson emphasize that the child, rather than the parents, must be the patient, and stress avoidance of early surgery, respect for the child's wishes including privacy, autonomy, sexual orientation, change of sex role, and access to surgery. Most importantly, they emphasize peer support and, breaking with the tradition of the journal, include a long list of contact addresses for peer support groups.

Last December, *Hormones and Behavior* published "Gender change from female to male in classical congenital adrenal hyperplasia." Meyer-Bahlburg *et al* report on several genetic females with adrenal hyperplasia, raised female, who changed sex role as adults. This article demolishes the "it's a girl, it's a girl, it will always be a girl" argument about CAH, and includes contact information for ISNA. ISNA is in touch with or aware of other individuals with CAH, raised female, who are now living as men. The fact that we cannot reliably predict gender identity in genetic females with CAH or genetic males assigned female is just one more reason to avoid early irreversible "normalizing" surgery.

## Update from New Zealand

Mani Bruce Mitchell

It's hard to believe all that has happened in the few short years since I first came upon a copy of *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* and wrote to ISNA. This happened in 1993, at a time when I had already done lots of healing work about my intersexuality, especially in Kubler-Ross grief and loss workshops. Still, it

wasn't until 1996 that I decided to come out as an intersex person, to claim back my original "boy" name, to establish the Intersex Society of New Zealand, and to go back to college in order to become a professional therapist. As I write this, I recall the personal transformation of finally being free of my own strangling cloak of shame and fear, now able to walk quietly, proudly as an intersex person.



Intersex Society of New Zealand's founder and director Mani Bruce Mitchell.

In August 1996, the Projecta Foundation made a seed grant to ISNZ. In October, I traveled to the US for the first ever international intersex retreat, and met other intersexuals for the first time in my life. I returned home armed with insight, vision, and passion, and the Intersex Society of New Zealand began to take shape. In November, ISNZ obtained the backing of the Regional Hospital's Sexual Health Manager.

In May of 1997, with the support of many local professionals and a member of Parliament, ISNZ held a gala opening at Victoria University. The opening received wide national print, television, and radio coverage, all of it supportive and positive. The media exposure unleashed an avalanche of need and interest. I was also invited to give presentations at local tertiary institutions (major referral centers).

I was invited to Spain to present *Hermaphrodites Speak!*, a half hour video taped at the 1996 retreat, at the 1997 World Congress of Sexology. Though both ISNZ and ISNA lacked the resources to send a speaker to Spain, we were able to present the video with the help of Dr. Eli Coleman of the Program in Human Sexuality in Minneapolis.

In August 1997 I was invited to give a presentation at an Austral-Asian sexual health conference in Hamilton NZ. In addition to my talk "Standing Outside the Binary," *Hermaphrodites Speak!* was screened, and ISNZ had a display booth in the main conference hall, which was staffed by supporters and ISNZ trustees.

In September 1997, ISNZ made an educational video for presentation at a medical conference which schedule conflicts prevented me from attending. Based on work with Pam Neeson of Wellington's sexual health clinic, the video promotes a new way of approaching intersex clients and challenges health professionals to see intersex not as pathology but as a variation.

In September, with the financial assistance of New Zealand's national airline, I again visited the US, meeting with intersex activists in several cities and attending the second retreat. Upon my return, feature articles on intersexuality and ISNZ appeared in *Who Weekly* (an affiliate of *People Magazine*) and *Next Magazine*, setting off a new flood of visibility, need, and interest.

In October I was invited by Garry Warne, Director of the Endocrinology and Diabetes section of the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria, Australia, to visit



Intersex Society of New Zealand opened an office in the Pacific Ghyia Center, May 1997.

his AIS Study Group as their guest. Our goal is to develop better strategies for helping all young intersex people — not just those with AIS. The interdisciplinary group includes a social worker, child psychiatrist, child psychotherapist, adolescent gynecologist, pediatric surgeon, and pediatric endocrinologist. We are also hoping to make a video which would present our work to medical audiences world-wide.

This has been for me a wonderfully encouraging development, to be able to have a dialog with sensitive, respectful medical people who are willing to consider that the traditional treatment protocol for so many of us actually worsens the very problems it was designed to alleviate!

This month the ISNZ trust will finalize the trust deed document, which allows us to register as a New Zealand charity.

### Update from Japan

Hideo Hashimoto (“Hasshi”)

My name is Hasshi. I have partial AIS, and though I was raised male and given some hormones during childhood, I was never subjected to genital surgery. I identify not as a man, but as the atypical sort of a person that I am. Why should it be necessary to force a male or female sex on people who are different?

In August of 1995 I founded Hijra Nippon, which is now called Peer Support for Intersexuals, or PESFIS. We provide support and information for intersexuals and their families; our goals are quite similar to ISNA’s.

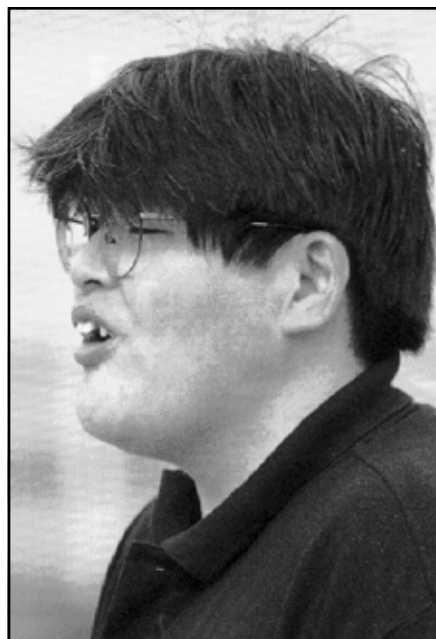
In Japan, mass screening is performed for congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH). Last year PESFIS submitted a request for information to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, which we hope will be the beginning of a dialog between the intersex patient advocacy movement and physicians. We are also working to introduce information about intersexuality to sex educators in Japan. This year, my book *Intersexuals Fight for Life!* was



PESFIS marches in Tokyo’s Gay and Lesbian Parade. Hasshi is wearing the cap.

published in Japan. We appreciate ISNA’s support in this endeavor; some of the material was translated from ISNA literature, including “Recommendations for Treatment.”

I am heartened to see the intersex patient advocacy movement spreading internationally, and proud to have established its first foothold here in Asia. Let’s continue to confront our societies with the inescapable reality of sexual variation!



Hasshi, founder of Japan’s Peer Support for Intersexuals (PESFIS).

### Hermaphrodites Speak!

In September 1996, eight intersex adults attending the first international retreat sat in front of a video camera and talked for half an hour about their lives, their bodies, and their resolve to put an end to the shame, secrecy, early surgery and deception which have caused so much harm.

At the time, participants considered it a historical document that would be stashed away in an archive — none were yet quite ready to come out so completely to the world. But the strength and passion gained at the retreat produced a determination to use our personal stories to effect change, and the participants granted permission to release the film.

*Hermaphrodites Speak!* is now being screened around the world in college classes, in medical schools, in film festivals (selling out at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival), at medical and sexological conferences, and in the homes of intersex families. Clips have been broadcast on several television programs. The PAL format, used in many countries other than the US and Japan, is distributed by Intersex Society of New Zealand.

Kudos to the brave pioneers who were willing to give up their privacy in order to make a better world!