

Are You A Boy or A Girl?
Contesting the Uncontested:
Intersex and Genders

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed) _____

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In this town - something's gotta change
In this town - something's gotta change

I'm looking at the world -
Looking for a scene -
Waiting for a day -
Filling in time like I'm digging
My own grave ...

In this town

Eurythmics (1986)

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ABSTRACT

One question that is perhaps most familiar in contemporary western societies is “is it a boy or a girl?” This question goes uncontested unless a child is born with ambiguous genitalia. The medical responses to these births have recently undergone considerable attention and criticism from within the medical profession, from parents, but most loudly from the individuals themselves. In contemporary discourses these individuals are referred to by and large as intersex. The burgeoning intersex movement has coalesced around a shared lived experience of trauma brought about in no small way by the invasive procedures of medical management in its attempts to diagnose, treat and cure. These procedures leave intersex individuals with feelings of isolation and abuse and that they have been lied to and misinformed. A ‘culture of silence’ has been created whereby not only has the incidence of intersex been vastly underestimated, but also the psychological, social and physical ramifications have been omitted from medical, patient and broader social discourses. While intersex individuals cite their own experiences as evidence of these ramifications, the medical profession has been largely unresponsive. Aside from the demand for more information, counselling and a change in the medical management of intersex, there are broader ramifications of intersex within society, notably a conceptualisation of sex, gender and sexuality. While these aspects are secondary issues for the intersex movement its presence and its significance cannot be understated. This study takes note of the significant issues pertinent to the intersex movement and employs a comparative analysis of the lived experiences of Intersex Australians and Americans. Further, this project investigates the historical and cross-cultural evidence of intersex, the way in which medical discourses dominate twentieth and twenty-first century conceptualisations and how the intersex movement itself was formed in the last decade.

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Hurt that's not supposed to show
And tears that fall when no one knows
When you're trying hard to be your best
Could you be a little less?

Do you know what it feels like for a girl?
Do you know what it feels like in this world?
What it feels like for a girl

What It Feels Like For a Girl
Madonna (2000)

You have the same human rights as everyone else in the world because you are a human being. These rights cannot be taken away from you. Everybody, no matter who they are or where they live, should be treated with dignity.

Article 1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
