Myths and Realities of Intersex Persons

(adapted from UBCs Positive Space information)

Intersexuality does not exist or is extremely rare.

Intersexuality does exist and is more common than people think. The prevalence of intersexuality varies depending on how it is defined. It is a set of medical conditions that feature congenital anomalies of the reproductive and sexual system. That is, Intersex persons are born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered 'standard' for either males or females.

Persons born Intersex are allowed to choose what medical intervention, if any, they would like.

Very often the attending childbirth physician will push the parents to make an on-the-spot decision to allow them to alter the child’s genitalia to more closely conform to either male or female (based on the doctor’s opinion). The parents will often along with this arbitrary decision on the physician’s part. Sometimes this decision is made by the physician without parental consent or knowledge. The reasoning is based on societal attitudes that isolate or exhibit passive or active bias toward anyone who is different.

Surgical intervention helps an Intersex child to be ‘normal’.

Sometimes it does help a child to live as a male or female, but most often it does not. The children quite often will not identify with the gender the birth physician has chosen for them, and pursue a surgical reassignment to correct this. Virtually always, the Intersex person is resentful that this decision was made without any consideration for their feelings or input. Also, the procedures performed often result in genital mutilation, causing physical and/or psychological discomfort and/or sexual dysfunction later in life.

Intersex persons are prone to sexual perversion or pedophilia.

This is an unsubstantiated and misinformed belief, used to discredit intersex persons, and similar myths exist about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans persons. Society often views someone who is different or exotic as a potential threat and thus, suspect. It is always based on lack of, or very limited exposure to individuals who identify as part of this community.

It isn’t worth the trouble to hire or retain an intersex employee.

Diversity in the workplace is always important, in fact invaluable. The more different points-of-view that you have in your company or organization, the better prepared you will be to meet the needs and demands of the diverse population who use your products, or services. Having more diversity in your workplace will cause you to become more aware of the negative effects of different types of oppression. Once you are aware you can start to take measure to prevent different forms of discrimination and harassment. That’s good for business and for our society.