

Intersex and Community...

A number of people have asked me about my involvement with the Intersex Community. There are many syndromes that are considered intersex, and activists have done a great deal to link us together. We have so much to learn from each other.

I polled my on line support groups about intersex last summer and I found the groups to be evenly split. Some women replied that they thought they were intersex, but were afraid to admit it. Other women were uncomfortable with the idea of including MRKH as an intersex condition. Identity is purely personal.

In the past year and a-half I have nurtured an insatiable passion for researching gender and sexual anomalies. I get a great sense of belonging that draws me back for more. Researching MRKH has led me down many other paths. I read about other conditions with an understanding of the issues that feels almost too clear.

My hardest personal challenge with MRKH is the loneliness. Even with a support network there are days I dread being with people because they represent gender; - normal gender. It reminds me that my own sense of gender feels so bare. The emptiness is not from the lack of feeling my gender, but more for where it belongs. Even those who experience gender in different ways still experience their own gender.

I see gender as a civil rights movement still in the stage of breaking the silence. We are bombarded by judgment based on ignorance; painfully impacting the rest of our lives. I keep getting lost in the haze around medicine and its power over basic civil rights. I ache for a distinct focus for my anger knowing it was a collective ignorance that imposed its view. My embarrassment comes not from myself- but from the shock of others. It's reassuring to hear other MRKH women speak of not 'fitting in' because I know I'm not alone out there. But it is infuriating that we are cast to define ourselves as not 'fitting in' rather than offered the place where we can belong.

I would like to think that we have learned through earlier civil rights movements but the minute you mention gender variation everyone scurries off. Even those who have always shown wisdom begin to shudder. WHY DO WE DO THAT? It took me back to the seventies.....

Ah the seventies. Those of us who remember those years and survived without permanent embarrassment, may remember a time of extremes. I had a paid job at a Women's Center and feminism consumed my life. We worked hard together. We played hard together. Some of us even slept together. It was exciting to watch the world change while being a part of making that happen. It was the start of Women's Shelters, Women's Health, and breaking into non-traditional jobs. It was the birth of Consciousness Raising and Feminist Therapy. We crossed milestone after milestone.

I also remember the 70's as a time to flounder; tripping over our differences in such a way that we often lost sight of our common goals. Even with a common purpose many women were at odds with each other. Lesbians challenged non-lesbians for sleeping with the enemy. Working-class women judged middle-class women for not seeing past their privilege. Women of color demanded recognition. Heterosexual women resented lesbians for being too exclusive. Separatists judged women with male children or pets for their involvement with male energy. There were fights over Christmas trees, Music Festivals, and whose politics were more pure. (We may laugh about it now, but this was serious stuff!). We worked really hard to muddle through all that and I won't lose sight of that lesson now. I found peace in this community and felt very much at home. And then my secret got out....

A group of women attacked me because they thought I was transsexual after one of them heard about my vaginal surgery. I was very active at the Women's Center and they wanted me out. They followed me home one night taunting me with slurs such as intruder and freak. They stoned me as they shouted about male privilege I never knew. Knowing feminist rage all too well I was scared, and kept on walking. Eventually they surrounded me; and after a scuffle, I was on the ground. I still remember what was running through my mind as I looked up at them. I choked on thoughts like: "But I AM a woman. I have test results". (To say I was insecure about my gender identity is an understatement.) I wanted to wave my XX credentials in their faces like a shield because I was not "like that". But the stronger part of me held silent, almost ashamed by my need to create this boundary for my own protection. They slapped me around a little and then they walked away. I didn't tell anyone about this assault until I wrote the Missing Vagina Monologue 20 years later. But the questions it raised have never left me.

I now open my identity to include a collection of variation. Although the details of our diagnosis may differ; AIS, CAH, MRKH, MURCS, XO, XXY; I am coming to realize that these acronyms are just my sibling's initials. I see a similar struggle and

approach it with a similar view. I have had my personal sense of gender challenged. I have had my body normalized to make other people comfortable. All of the above was motivated by presumption which became white-coat violence the moment I lost my choice. These issues/concerns certainly cross the diagnosis borders and confront all of us at some time or other.

So am I intersex? I believe that I am. As I grow with my MRKH identity, intersex is a large part of that. Whether it is because my body was born a shameful variety, altered so that it wouldn't be; or the emotional journey that experience has been I don't yet know. I believe I am Intersex because I was never considered normal enough to be left untreated. Intersex can be a community for all of us. It's a lot less lonely that way. It does give folks something to think about....