

# Is it a boy or a girl?

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item. Even intersex advocates diverge on the issue of binary gender roles, with some saying there should be a third gender indicated from birth.

The idea of an "I" being placed on a driver's license has been proposed, but as Koyama says: "I don't think driver's licenses need gender, but as long as they have it, it should be based on

what people identify as, not on what their genitals look like. What people who want to create the 'I' category in the driver's license are saying is, if your genitals look like this, then you have to be this."

ISNA and Bodies Like Ours have convinced an increasing number of medical facilities—including hospitals in Oakland, Calif., and Ann Arbor, Mich.—to stop automatically performing these surgeries and rethink the protocol.

There have also been conversions of individual doctors, such as Johns Hopkins' Bill Reimer, who has acknowledged ISNA's influence on his decision to switch from performing surgeries to becoming a pediatric psychiatrist whose practice includes treating children with atypical genitalia.



The stars of *Hermaphrodites Speak!* on retreat in 1994: (back row, from left) Heidi Walcutt, Thomas Streun, Max Beck, (middle row, from left) Angela Moreno, David Vandertie, Mani Mitchell, Martha Coventry, (front row, from left) Suegee Tamar, filmmaker Cheryl Chase and Hilda Vilorio



Nova documentary on the subject (except David Reimer, the "intersex poster boy" who is not intersex). The 20/20 segment "Intersex Babies" included a long clip from *Hermaphrodites Speak!* Interestingly, the issue of the genital mutilation of African and Middle Eastern women has received considerable media attention in the past decade or so. Alice Walker's book and film *Warrior Marks* introduced the subject into the national dialogue, and some intersex advocates have complained that the same sense of outrage has been absent from discussions of the phenomenon in the United States.

Cheryl Chase started the Intersex Society of North America "to create a world free of secrecy, shame and unwanted genital surgery for intersexed people"

## THE MEDIA

The media remain a crucial but often fickle friend to queer communities—more so to intersex people. Koyama cites episodes of *ER* (good) and *Friends* (bad) as examples of growing awareness, for better or worse, of the issue in the popular imagination.

More in-depth portrayals have been presented by the Discovery Channel, PBS and ABC's 20/20 in the past year or so. Discovery's special *Is It a Boy or a Girl?*—nominated for an award by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation—presented a balanced account, but PBS failed to interview a single intersex person for its one-hour

Even some prominent feminists, including Germaine Greer, have shown indifference or hostility to the idea of intersex (echoing prominent feminists' indifference or hostility to the idea of lesbian decades ago).

## ACTIVISM

Queer observers may find the hysteria around the issue of intersex reminiscent of historical homophobia. There's a familiar ring to the "concealment-based model" used by the medical establishment, the shame and secrecy associated with the intersex condition, the need to protect parents from the distress of knowing their

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