

Zwischengeschlecht.org

Human Rights for Hermaphrodites too!

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11th EMBL/EMBO
Science and Society Conference
The Difference between the Sexes -
From Biology to Behaviour
EMBL Advance Training Centre (ATC)
Attn. Mr. Háldor Stefánsson
Science & Society Programme Manager
Meyerhofstraße 1
69117 Heidelberg

Heidelberg, November 6th 2010

Open Letter of Concern

Dear Mr Stefánsson

Dear Speakers of the 11th EMBL/EMBO Science and Society Conference

The history of the sciences of sex and sexual differentiation, including amongst other disciplines, biology, endocrinology, genetics, sexology and gender studies, is inextricably intertwined with the history of the medical crimes committed on hermaphrodites (1). These ongoing medical crimes, after 1950 systematically perpetrated on defenseless children are arguably one of the worst human rights violations in post-WW2 western societies.

Which is the main reason why, while most of the ‚endangered‘ minorities in western societies were able to improve their situation because of the Enlightenment and scientific progress, hermaphrodites are the exception.

In the middle ages, although hermaphrodites were at great risk of becoming victims of infanticide, at least the surviving ones were better off than today. Not only were they legally recognised and as adults had the privilege of choosing for themselves between being recognised as males or females, but most important, they were also allowed to grow up physically intact and unharmed.

While today, despite a prevalence of 1: 2000, as a species hermaphrodites are virtually extinct, both in real life and in public perception.

Even worse, today at least 90% were (and still are!) submitted to on average multiple medically unnecessary surgical genital mutilations in early childhood, resulting in appallingly high risk of lifelong loss of genital sensation, physical pain and severe psychological traumata (notably according to studies by the mutilators themselves (2).

This fall from (relative) grace is directly linked to the curiosity and claim of authority of above mentioned modern sciences, shifting the earlier right of self-determination of the hermaphrodites concerned to scientists and doctors deciding for them by force and scalpel according to the latest ‚state of the art‘.

Starting from vivisection in search of the gonads in order to diagnose/determine them as either male or female ‚pseudohermaphrodites‘ or as one of the rare few ‚real hermaphrodites‘, and thereby losing their erstwhile right to self determination and physical integrity in any case, to

today's differentiation a.o. by SRY, 'brain sex', hermaphrodites served and continue to serve as the 'cannon fodder' and literal guinea pigs of the related sciences concerned with sex and sexual differentiation, directly or indirectly, in some function or another.

And the more advanced and sophisticated the related scientific disciplines grew, the more total the medical extinction of the hermaphrodites became.

During the first half of the 20th century, the basic scientific knowledge and pre-conditions were established, namely in the fields of biology / genetics, endocrinology and (urological / gynecological) surgery.

Only 1950 researchers found a way to overcome the notorious reluctance of adult hermaphrodites to submit to comply, by starting to systematically 'treating' them in their early infancy, since they found the parents to be by far more easily persuaded. And in 1955 a now infamous scientist came up with a perfectly fitting theory, too.

This scientist was of course John Money, nowadays synonymous with the grave injuries and injustice done to hermaphrodites 'in the past', as today's perpetrators claim for the record goes. While some of the earlier experimentators and theorists like e.g. Eugen Steinach or Leo Stanley or Richard Goldschmidt are known mostly to historians only, other names are current till today as 'fathers' of their field, e.g. Hugh Hampton Young, Adolf Butenandt, Lawson Wilkins or Andrea Prader. However, their 'work' on hermaphrodites is mostly missing in their hagiographies and again is known to specialised historians only. (4)

In the last decade, criticism of abuse of hermaphrodites in the name of scientific theories and research started to emerge by the people concerned, aimed mostly at the new discipline of gender studies (3). In the meantime, this criticism is becoming a topic further explored by criticised themselves, however, up to now still considerably hindered presumably by blind spots of the 'gender lens'. (5)

On the other hand, detailed criticism aimed at the 'hard science' disciplines seems almost non-existent, let alone empathy from the scientists concerned, despite the obvious and close bi-directional relations, i.e. both with regards to the ongoing medical crimes against hermaphrodites and the published data thereof being part of the foundation of these disciplines, as well as new findings within these 'purely scientific' disciplines inevitably being used by the actual perpetrators to justify and perpetuate their bloody deeds.

No one will ever know, how many lives of innocent hermaphrodite children were irreversibly ruined or even lost by medical crimes in the name of science, how many suffered from mutilated and butchered genitals, loss of sexual sensation, constant pain, horrific scars, massive trauma, suicide, to name just some of most obvious consequences.

As members of a human rights advocacy group and persons who are either victims of these inhuman practices and/or personally know many others, we feel we are not able to be part of an academic discussion about 'The Difference between the Sexes - From Biology to Behaviour'. (6)

Instead, we feel it is our duty to commemorate the victims first, and to publicly ask for a new beginning of adequately considering the inherent real life ethical and human rights implications of the scientific quest for knowledge in matters of sex and sexual differentiation – which we feel would be adequate, only if it leads to practical consequences actively contributing to end the ongoing medical crimes against innocent children.

We're open to participate in an open debate about our concerns after the vigil if you wish so, or at some future occasion.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards

for Zwischengeschlecht.org

Daniela Truffer (President)

The human rights advocacy group Zwischengeschlecht.org demands the prohibition of forced genital surgeries on intersexed people and „Human Rights for Hermaphrodites too!“

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- (1) Commonly used as a derogatory and offensive word, ‚Hermaphrodite‘ is recently being reclaimed with pride by individuals and advocacy groups alike. However, many of the people concerned prefer the terms ‚intersex‘ or ‚intersexed‘ (to avoid conflation with ‚heterosexual‘, ‚homosexual‘, ‚transsexual‘ etc.). The new medical term ‚DSD (Disorders of Sexual Development)‘ on the other hand is met by contempt almost unanimously.
- (2) Martina Jürgensen: Klinische Evaluationsstudie im Netzwerk DSD/Intersexualität: Zentrale Ergebnisse“, Presentation Berlin, May 27th 2009 [„Lübeck Study“], p. 3 below: „Beschreibung des Samples“
Online (PDF): http://kastrationsspital.ch/public/Corpus-delicti_27-5-09.pdf
- (3) Emi Koyama / Lisa Weasel: ‚From Social Construction to Social Justice: Transforming How We Teach About Intersexuality‘ (Women’s Studies Quarterly, 2002)
Online (PDF): <http://www.ipdx.org/pdf/wsq-intersex.pdf>
See also:
Emi Koyama / Lisa Weasel / Alice Dreger: „Teaching Intersex Issues. A Guide for Teachers in Women’s. Gender and Queer Studies. Second Edition (2003)
Online (PDF): <http://www.ipdx.org/publications/pdf/teaching-intersex.pdf>
- (4) Zwischengeschlecht.org: “The Extermination of Hermaphrodites in the ‚Developed World““
Online: <http://zwischengeschlecht.org/pages/The-Extermination-of-Hermaphrodites-in-the-Developed-World>
- (5) From a human rights point of view, it’s difficult to understand how Anne Fausto-Sterling, despite being obviously sympathetic to the plights of the intersexed, is able to find kind words and even praise for an abominal butcher like the notorious Hugh Hampton Young.
- (6) By the way: The motto of one of the contemporary ‚DSD‘-research organisations responsible for the perpetuation of the mutilations is ‚From Gene to Gender‘.