



I IS FOR
INTERSEX
Wednesday, November 11 @ 19:00 - 20:30

On Wednesday 11th November, LGBT Health and Wellbeing hosted an online LGBTQ+ community discussion in which we provided an informative and supportive space for the community to learn more about Intersex people*, variations of sex characteristics (VSC) and the lived, unique experiences of some Intersex people.

BSL Interpreters: Rachel Amey and Lisa Stapleton
Facilitator: Jules Stapleton Barnes (LGBT Health and Wellbeing)

Guest Speakers, Magda Rakita and Elizabeth Reiff shared some of their own experiences as Intersex people and engaged in community discussion. We were also joined by Rebecca Crowther from Equality Network who outlined some of the work being done to support and include Intersex people within policy.

*Intersex people are individuals whose anatomy or physiology differ from contemporary cultural stereotypes of what constitutes typical male and female: <http://www.ukia.co.uk/>

By increasing awareness and insight for those attending it was our aim to help address some of the social prejudice, ignorance and stigmatisation which surround Intersex people.

Ahead of the event, we asked the community via social media channels to respond to an anonymous poll to discover what people hoped to gain by attending.

In a word or 2, what do you hope to gain by attending this event?

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To learn more **Intersex awareness**

a better understanding

lived experiences **understanding** perspective
opportunity **understanding** Victory

Community **Rarity** **insight** Knowledge, understanding

Knowledge about intersex

lived experience

Show Q&A

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Speaker 1: Magda Rakita



Magda describes herself as an intersex woman, which best reflects her lived experience. Support and community group meetings had a tremendously positive impact on her life and experiences as an intersex person, she is passionate about building supportive spaces for other intersex people and their families. She is co-founder of Interconnected UK. She lives in Cambridge, UK, and works as a documentary photographer.

Speaker 2: Elizabeth Reiff

Based in Fife, Elizabeth is an Intersex and Bi activist who has been involved in running Edinburgh's Bi Community Group, Bi and Beyond, for nearly a decade.

In Elizabeth's own words, "I have Mayer-Rokitansky-Kuster-Hauser Syndrome, which I'll abbreviate to MRKH most of the time. It is the congenital absence of the uterus and vagina, but with the presence of ovaries. A person with this will experience breast growth and typical female hormones at puberty, so will 'appear' female outwardly (including having a vulva) but will never menstruate and never be able to have children. There are some recent experiments with uterus transplants which have been successful but they are very few and I am far too old.*

I have MRKH Type 2, which means I have other health problems such as the fact that I have only one kidney and I have hearing problems. Spinal issues can also be a factor but I seem to have mostly escaped those so far."



*Absence or extreme underdevelopment, I fall into the second category for the uterus and I am fully missing a vagina.

Language

The language used by Intersex people to describe themselves varies from person to person. Intersex is ‘an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy’ (<https://interactadvocates.org/>).

Our Guest Speakers, Magda and Elizabeth, described how the language they use to talk about themselves helps to make sure they are viewed as individuals with unique experiences.’

- “I don’t say, I’m intersex. I go, this is what’s going on with me, and this is how my body is and how my body works.”
- “I think that may help because then they’re sort of looking at *me* and not an identity” – **Magda Rakita**

Medical Community and Support Groups

Most intersex people are born healthy and the majority do not require medical interventions, however a variation of sex characteristics has often been treated as a medical emergency. Magda and Elizabeth shared some of their own experiences of interacting with the medical community and expressed that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding intersex.

They discussed how, in their experiences, support groups have enabled people to get accurate and appropriate medical information. These groups also help people to feel supported in an inclusive environment that celebrates diverse bodies.

Intersex and Policy

Rebecca Crowther joined our event to outline some of the work that is being done in Scotland by Equality Network to address Intersex equality within policy - <https://www.equality-network.org/>.

Within the 2009 Hate Crime Bill, Intersex was included within the definition of Transgender. There has been much debate surrounding this inclusion and the need for a new, separate, Intersex category has been promoted by many groups, including Equality Network. At the time of our event, Rebecca let us know that next week, oral evidence was to be presented to the Scottish Government which shared lived experiences and stories from Intersex people.

***Update** - Rather than including Intersex within the definition of Transgender, the Bill now includes a separate category of 'variations in sex characteristics' within the Hate Crime Bill. This distinction is very important because, although some people who are Intersex do identify as Trans, Intersex is not the same as Trans. This is a positive update that ensures Intersex people and their varying experiences are acknowledged and included separately within the Bill.

Rebecca also touched upon the recent inclusive education recommendations that have been accepted by the Scottish Government.

- "Through those conversations with the Scottish Government, we decided that it was very important for Intersex to be included within this and to be included distinctly from LGBT because it is different. It does come with different experiences and different issues."

Features from our community

Q. How to be a good Ally?

This is a question that came up a lot from the community. Magda and Elizabeth both expressed that it was very important to **ask** an individual how best to support them.

“Don’t think that we are all a monolith. We all feel differently. We all have this wide variety of different conditions and variations. Meet us where we are.” - **Magda Rakita**

“I just want to say that you’re doing great because you’re here. What we can ask you to do is to share information from reputable sources, like the organisations mentioned by Becky*.”
- **Elizabeth Reiff**

* See Resources section

Q. Recommendations of TV/Film created by Intersex artists?

- River Gallo is an Intersex filmmaker who billed themselves as the first Intersex director to make a fictional short film about being Intersex, Ponyboi. You can watch it here:
[‘https://www.rivergallo.com/video’](https://www.rivergallo.com/video)
- MTV’S ‘Faking It’ - (TV; Consulted with Intersex people)
- ‘Intersexion’ - (Documentary; Created by Intersex people)
- Lynnell Stephani Long’s theatrical performances of “My body is my body” and “Momma & them call me James” have been shown at international film festivals around the world.

Community Feedback

- “I love that you are also **giving us some vocabulary** by speaking and sharing today. That is part of why these events are really really useful for the community.”
- “Thank you so much Magda and Elizabeth for **sharing** - it’s so important.”
- “My first LGBT Health event this evening (Elizabeth invited me) - I’ve learned so much, and I think Zoom worked really well, it was **great to feel connected** to a wider community again.”
- “Very **inspired** by Elizabeth and Magda.”
- “I’m really **impressed, overwhelmed and** inspired by both of your talks! Thank you so much for sharing!!”
- “Thanks for such an amazing, **sincere, and informative** session.”
- “Thank you so much. This is an area within LGBT+ that I know little about, and it’s **great to learn**. Many thanks to the speakers for sharing their experiences. LGBT H&W has been vital to me.”
- “Thanks Jules for organising a fantastic event and making it **accessible** for Deaf BSL users! Thanks also Rachel and Lisa for interpreting tonight! Thank you also Elizabeth and Magda for sharing your stories xx”
- “Thank you all, and thank you Jules for hosting. A super **helpful** evening.”

Useful Resources

Interconnected UK

<http://interconnecteduk.org/>

MRKH Organization

<http://mrkh.org/> - For further reading on MRKH, and specifically, The Missing Vagina Monologue by Esther Morris Leidolf

Intersex #ownvoices books, collated by Bogi Takács @bogiperson

<https://www.obvibase.com/p/BRhZeTG6GZyYUt2G/?location=%7B%22type%22%3A%22table%22%2C%22databaseId%22%3A%22BRhZeTG6GZyYUt2G%22%2C%22queryPath%22%3A%7B%22recordPath%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%22columnPath%22%3A%5B%221%22%5D%7D%7D>

YOUth&I, Intersex stories from Intersex young people

<https://darlington.org.au/youthandi/> - free download here

Intersex: New Interdisciplinary Approaches (INIA Project)

<https://www.intersexnew.co.uk/>

The Variations of Sex Characteristics and Intersex Survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/IVSC>

International Intersex Virtual Forum: How to be a good Intersex Ally:

<https://ilga.org/intersex-forum-webinar-allyship>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esCzULbrCa0>

Intersex Human Rights Australia

<https://ihra.org.au/>

Equality Network

<https://www.equality-network.org/intersex/>

