

I am a twentysomething legal female. I was actually born intersexed and "fixed" to be female

by Dan Savage

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Q. I am a twentysomething legal female. For the longest time, I thought I was transgender, as my build and tastes made me feel like a bisexual man in a woman's body. (I'm 6-1 and pass for male with ease.) Just recently I had it confirmed that I was actually born intersexed and "fixed" to be female, which made two decades of confusion suddenly make sense. I'm fine with third-gender status. Here's the problem: I tend to be attracted to bi or gay guys, but these guys tend to view me as female once the clothes come off. The girl parts I have don't really work, and (thanks to the wonders of modern medicine) I lack a proper rod. So how do I approach the issue of my real gender in a way a bi or gay guy can accept?

A. Your letter has been sitting in my inbox for months, MARIO, taunting me, making me feel like a coward. Whatever I say to you, however tactfully I attempt to say it, packs of howling trannies are going to come at me with meat cleavers. (And trannies aren't afraid to use 'em.) But I couldn't bring myself to delete your e-mail because I hate feeling like a fraidy cat. Sooner or later I would have to work up the nerve to respond. Well, it's midnight and I'm busting out a column in a bar on the North Side of Chicago (props to the Hopleaf) and I saw your letter and I figured, hell, if I'm going to get into trouble no matter how I answer your question, MARIO, why not answer it drunk? So after three courage-enhancing beers and two bartender's-attractiveness-enhancing shots, here's my advice, you legal female, you . . .

No, wait. First I probably need to give a little background briefing to any readers out there confused by your letter: MARIO, you see, was born a hermaphrodite the website of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), "The word 'hermaphrodite' is a stigmatizing and misleading word," as it "implies that a person is born with two sets of genitals is something that cannot occur." (Oh, and the intersexed are not trannies, so I've managed to p*ss off everyone in both groups already just doing background here!) An intersexed baby is born with one set of genitals, a sort of smashup of male and female bits. Most doctors encourage parents of babies with "ambiguous genitalia" to choose a gender and then surgically alter the newborn's genitals. The parents are instructed to never tell the child he or she was born a he-she, lest they confuse the kid about his or her gender identity.

But gender is an odd thing chromosomes. Give a girl-brained kid male genitals and raise her as a boy and her mind will rebel against her assigned gender. Likewise, give a male-brained kid female genitals and raise him as a girl and he'll rebel against his assigned gender. That's why parents with intersexed newborns should leave their children's genitals the hell alone; they shouldn't subject their babies to "the wonders of modern medicine."

Since there's no way of telling if an intersexed baby has a girl brain or a boy brain, odds are 50/50 that the parents and the doc will choose the wrong gender. Two decades later you've got a very bitter adult on your hands, a man or a woman who feels lied to and mutilated and, thanks to the surgery he or she never consented to, may well be incapable of experiencing any sexual sensation at all right gender!

Instead of surgery, ISNA argues that an intersexed baby should be raised as a boy or a girl, with the understanding that the child may decide on a different gender identity later in life. Surgery is only to be performed "if and when the intersexed person requests it, and then only after she or he has been fully informed of the risks," which can include "risk to life, fertility, continence, and sensation." While growing up with scrambled bits can be a drag, being an adult who's incapable of experiencing any sexual sensation at all is a much bigger drag. And "parental distress," one of the top reasons given for doing the surgery, "is not a sufficient reason to risk a child's life, fertility, continence, and sensation," says ISNA.

ISNA's absolutely right. I agree 100 percent. You go, girls. And boys. I bet all the trannies and intersexed folks out there loved that part of the response. Now on to the part that will send them all running for their meat cleavers: MARIO wants to know how to "approach the issue of my real gender in a way a bi or gay guy can accept." What MARIO means, of course, is this: "How do I tell gay and bi guys about my scrambled bits without scaring them off? What magic words will convince gay and bi guys who are attracted to me as a male to sleep with me after I tell them the big news?"

Sorry, MARIO, but those magic words don't exist. Most gay men want to be with other men, not with trannies, bois, the intersexed, or legal women who can pass for bi males. While it's fine for you to be attracted to gay and bi men, it doesn't follow that gay and bi men are under any obligation to find you attractive. Harsh, I realize, but reality. There may be gay and bi men out there open to the idea of being with a lanky near-miss, MARIO, but those guys are going to be few and far between, and I'll bet you anything that none of them live in Ohio.

If you want to score with the gay and bi dudes suggest you take those girl parts and that improper rod of yours to a place like, say, San Francisco, where FTMs (female-to-male transsexuals), the intersexed, and the men who love them are more vocal and visible.

Q. I'm a 19-year-old FTM who identifies as queer. My best friend used to make comments about being attracted to me when I was female and I always just shook it off because he was gay. Now that I'm not female anymore, I wonder. I think I'm in love with him now. I don't want to make a fool out of myself by declaring how I feel just so he can tell me he doesn't feel the same, but at the same time, it's getting harder to keep my feelings to myself. Any advice would be much appreciated.

A. If you tell him how you feel, BID, and he's not into you, well, where are you? Right back where you started: crushed out on a guy who isn't into you. But there's a chance friend might be into the brand-new, boobless you. The only way to find out, though, is by declaring how you feel. I can't imagine that someone brave enough to have her tits cut off is afraid of a little run-of-the-mill romantic rejection. You're a boi now, BID: Have some balls.

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