

Suggested Guidelines for Non-Intersex Individuals Writing about Intersexuality and Intersex People

By Emi Koyama (Inspired by **Jacob Hale's** *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans_____*. Editing suggestions by **Cheryl Chase**.)

- 1. Recognize that you are not the experts about intersex people, intersexuality, or what it means to be intersexed; intersex people are.** When writing a paper about intersexuality, make sure to center voices of intersex people.
- 2. Critically approach writings by non-intersex "experts" such as doctors, scientists, and academics about intersexuality or intersex people** if you decide to quote or cite them. That is, consider what the author's perspective and agenda are, and where his or her knowledge comes from.
- 3. Do not write about intersex existence or the concept of intersexuality without talking about the lives and experiences of intersex people as well as issues they face.** Do not use intersex people merely to illustrate the social construction of binary sexes.
- 4. Do not judge the politics and narratives of intersex people or movement based on how useful they are to your political agenda** (or agendas). Intersex people are no more responsible for dismantling gender roles or compulsory heterosexuality than anyone else is.
- 5. Be aware that writings by intersex people are often part of conversations within the intersex movement and/or with other communities, including the medical community. Realize that intersex people's words may be addressing certain constituencies or political agendas for which you do not have access to the full context.**

6. **Do not conflate intersex experiences with lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) experiences.** You may understand what it might feel to grow up "different" if you are part of the LGBT community, but that really does not mean you understand what it means to grow up intersexed.
7. **Do not reduce intersex people to their physical conditions.** Depict intersex people as multidimensional human beings with interests and concerns beyond intersex issues.
8. **Focus on what looking at intersexuality or intersex people tells you about yourself and the society, rather than what it tells you about intersex people.** Turn analytical gaze away from intersex bodies or genders and toward doctors, scientists, and academics who theorize about intersexuality.
9. **Do not represent intersex people as all the same.** How people experience being born intersex is at least as diverse as how people experience being born non-intersex, and is impacted by various social factors such as race, class, ability, and sexual orientation, as well as actual medical conditions and personal factors. Do not assume that one intersex person you happen to meet represents all or even most intersex people.
10. **Assume that some of your readers will themselves be intersex, and expect that you may be criticized by some of them.** Listen to intersex people when they criticize your work, and consider it a gift and a compliment. If they thought that you had nothing to contribute, they would not bother to engage with you in the first place.
11. **No writings about intersexuality or intersex people should make light of the immediate crisis: five children are being mutilated every day in the United States alone.** *Think about what you can do to help stop that.*

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