

The Caster Semenya Issue

A Message to the Media (and to people talking to the Media)

It would greatly help our cause (and Caster's) if you could take notice of the following in any media material that you prepare. Thank you.

Please.... please.... do NOT use any 'hermaphrodite' terms

Terms like 'hermaphrodite' and 'pseudo-hermaphrodite' are very offensive to most people with intersex conditions, many of whom, like the vast majority of our members, appear completely female (even if they might have XY chromosomes and intra-abdominal testes).

A 'hermaphrodite' is a mythical creature from classical literature and cannot exist amongst humans (no human being has a complete set of male and female organs). It's unfortunate that medicine borrowed this term in the 1800s, before the science of human development was invented. Medical terms based on 'hermaphrodite' have been obsolete for a number of years now, and as Alice Dreger (Professor of Clinical Medical Humanities and Bioethics, and author of *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*) says in her own media advisory:

Please note that if you are interviewing a doctor who is using the term "hermaphrodite" or "pseudo-hermaphrodite," you are not talking to a doctor who is current enough on the medical literature to be trusted. Move on to someone who is current.

Don't interview doctors who are out of touch with psychosocial reality

We recommend you contact the specialist clinicians at UCLH (www.uclh.nhs.uk/OurServices/ServiceA-Z/WH/GYNAE/DSD/Pages/Home.aspx). Don't use doom and gloom clinicians who bang on about the rarity of intersex, and who over-dramatise things using the 'shock, horror' angle. Like the general cosmetic surgeon (not even an intersex specialist) who, in the first of two BBC Radio 4 *Today* programmes (11 Sept '09), agreed with the presenter's comment that: "It really is a *curse* then, to have one of these conditions".

Until we intervened, the *Mirror* too was planning to make use of this medic's speculations about Caster Semenya (alongside an article by one of our members, 14 Sept '09) using statements like "Her disorder [she was a pseudo-hermaphrodite, he'd just suggested] is extremely rare", and she was "likely to have been deeply in denial about it all. She will have feared being ostracised from society.....as she struggles through this horrendous, shocking experience.....".

For the last 10-15 years we have campaigned to change attitudes in society, perpetuated by old-school medics like this, so that intersex is *not* viewed as shocking/unacceptable. People like this can unravel all that, in one short interview.

Use the term 'sex testing' and not 'gender testing'

Gender is to a large extent a *social* construction that depends on upbringing, culture etc., and involves some degree of choice (i.e. whether you choose to live your life as a woman, as a man, or possibly with an androgynous or intersex

personal identity). Babies (intersex or otherwise) do not yet have a gender. If someone is particularly desperate to clarify an adult's gender they can just ask them. It is *sex* (one's *biological* attributes) that Olympic committees and the like are seeking to police, not gender.

Don't confuse biological intersex with gender dysphoria (transsexuality)

Intersex is where there has been some unusual development of the reproductive/genital system in the womb due to genetic or hormonal factors and which can result in a mix of male and female characteristics. Intersex is not synonymous with ambiguous genitalia. It includes people, possibly in the majority, whose external genital anatomy does not appear unusual and who have no confusion about their gender. Intersex is an umbrella term covering a number of specific diagnoses such as androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS). *Transsexuality* or *transgender* is where there is a normal reproductive/genital system but the person feels that their gender ID (their sense of what sex they are) doesn't match their biological sex. They are said to suffer from *gender dysphoria*.

Please don't invent new terms of your own

In a Sunday Times editorial (23 Aug '09) about the Caster Semenya issue titled *No sexing please – let's all race together*, Dominic Lawson ranted on about transgendered people with gender dysphoria then started talking about people who "on the other hand are 'transex' and who were previously grouped under the misleading term, hermaphrodite". There is no such thing as 'transex'. In fact there are no 'trans' terms that relate to intersex. He clearly should have said 'intersex'.

Please don't play the 'We're helping to save Caster' card

Don't pontificate that all the publicity may potentially save Caster Semenya from "a substantial risk of cancer in internal testes, if she has AIS". There is *small* risk of cancer in adulthood in such cases, but the risk is considerably lower than the risk of breast cancer in the female population as a whole; and no one is saying young women's breasts should be routinely removed as a precautionary measure. The issue is that it's somewhat more difficult to monitor intra-abdominal testes for potentially cancerous changes than it is in the case of breast tissue.

Please don't indulge in lazy journalism

Don't just search the personal stories on our site for the angriest and most depressing one you can find, then reproduce it as a newspaper/magazine article, as Jeremy Laurance did for the *Independent* (12 Sept '09) and without, in his case, even attempting to seek approval from the story writer (via our group at least).

Please do mention our support group

Please quote our web address **www.aissg.org** (but NOT our email address) in any article. Many articles seem to be written for the prurient interest of those who are unaffected by such conditions. Be aware that some readers could be affected, or suspect they are affected by one of these conditions, but may not have been given truthful information by doctors/parents. Please direct them to information/support.

Please read the following

www.aissg.org/21_overview.htm#terminology
www.alicedreger.com/media_advisory_01.html