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PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

An ideology of erasure

Interphobia in right-wing extremism: A call for intersex-affirmative therapy

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ABSTRACT

The discrimination faced by intersex people plays a major role in their life, including therapeutic and psychological settings. Thus, the range and expression of interphobia is crucial for therapists and practitioners to understand as part of an inter-affirmative therapeutic approach. The article examines the writings of key proponents the German-speaking extreme right, with the understanding that many of these interphobic ideas hold true for society at large. By analysing seven interphobic strategies used by the extreme right, we understand how their narratives about intersex people continue to propagate a two-sex hegemony. The seven strategies are: ignore, deny, pathologise, employ paternalism, conjure up the polarity of man and woman, make direct attacks, and functionalise completely different issues to further their political agenda. The article explores the intrinsic entanglement of interphobia with racism, antisemitism, nationalism, social Darwinism, two-sex ideology, heterosexism, cissexism, and sexism and it is also a reconstruction of relevant discourses in sexology, psychology, and gender studies. I advocate for an understanding of human development that is non-hierarchical and therefore does not value any particular expression of human bodies over any other. Pathologisation and ‘fixing’ is contraindicated to healing and resilience, and if therapy is to be inter-affirmative, it needs to accurately reflect the interphobic lived realities of clients’ lives.

KEYWORDS: interphobia; right-wing extremism; intersex; intersex-affirmative therapy

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Content warning: Mentions of interphobia. Quotations featuring descriptions of intersex bodies using offensive slurs. Graphic descriptions of medical interventions and surgeries.

Despite what doctors may say, I don't have any health problems related to my genitals, I don't have recurring infections, pain or problems related to my menstrual flow, and I enjoy sexuality without problems.... I also have no social problems because ... of my atypical genitalia, besides we don't go naked in daily life. I'm 33 years old and I feel happy with who I am and with the body I have. If I had problems in the past, it was because of the humiliating treatment doctors gave me, denigrating language they used to refer to my body and the ignorance of my parents at the time. (Inter, 2017, para. 12)

INTRODUCTION

In therapies, the realities of people's lives play a major role. This also includes experiences of discrimination. In relation to the topic of intersex, this is called interphobia.

Interphobia can be found in society as a whole. It can be found in the extreme right in an exemplary, pointed, and openly formulated way. Since this is well suited for analysis, the article presents interphobia on the basis of the discourses of the extreme right, though most of it holds true for society at large. The focus of the discussion is Germany and Austria.

I assume that a knowledge of interphobia is of key importance when one has an intersex client. Therapy and other psychological settings and their implications for working with intersex clients are therefore the framework of this contribution, which is anything but exhaustive.

The contribution is also a reconstruction of relevant discourses in sexology, psychology, and gender studies.

The article first deals with what is meant by 'two-sex hegemony' and 'interphobia' and outlines a historical aspect of intersex pathologisation in Europe. Knowledge in this field is necessary to understand interphobic articulations today. They are the subject of the next section, which focuses on the far-right and analyses its handling of intersex people and topics on the basis of seven strategies. For this purpose, the works of key thinkers of the German speaking far and conservative right from Catholic (Kuby; Kelle), evangelical (Spreng; Seubert), clerical fascist (Agenda Europe), evolutionary-biological (Kutschera), psychiatric (Spaemann; Bonelli), journalistic (Röhl; Zastrow; Reichel), as well as political actors from the Identitarian Movement (Willinger; Sellner), the New Right (Blaue Narzisse), and party-political (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ); Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)) milieus will be examined, some of which are translated into several languages and are widely received in Europe and beyond. This section also includes digressions on the ethno-national community and reproductive imperatives. The following section discusses the complex topics around

John Money, David Reimer, the gender concept in sexology and feminism, and right-wing actors in order to detail the analysed seventh strategy. A concluding observation is devoted to the exuberant fear of identity loss in the far-right, shows the intersections between masculinity, racism, and antisemitism, and deals with the relationship between capitalism and two-sex hegemony. It gives an antifascist recommendation, in which amongst others the playing-off of intersex and transgender folks against each other is addressed, and it closes before the backgrounds mentioned with a call for inter-affirmative therapy.

Political struggles of intersex people have made them more visible than ever. If intersex topics are reported on mainstream channels, the far-right will amplify them with ridicule and protest. The number of interphobic articulations has increased significantly in recent years. Intersex struggles for self-determination, visibility, freedom, and justice often meet with contempt and aggression. At the same time, it is striking that gender and sexuality are rarely included in analyses of right-wing extremism. If, on the other hand, analysis happens, there is an imbalance: criticism of gender constructions and forced identity are formulated much less frequently than criticism of gender hierarchies and obvious inequality between men and women. Sexism and antifeminism are still the most likely to be addressed; the analysis of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or other sexuality and gender diverse identities) is subordinate to this and is also hierarchical in itself: anti-gay resentments are more likely to be named than anti-lesbian, transphobia is rarely mentioned, and articulations against bisexual and/or intersex people almost never (Köttig et al., 2017; Kováts & Pöim, 2015; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017).

The German-speaking far-right, with its catchwords 're-education' and 'genderism', has created an ideological construct that is directly related to intersex discourses. The interphobic effects and resentments of a specifically right-wing discourse on 'gender(ism)' and the defence of the binary constructs of sex and gender are discussed on the one hand; on the other hand, the far-right response to intersex topics and the discrimination of intersex people by right-wing theorists is presented. These kinds of conceptions produce erasure and threat of violence against intersex clients, their bodies, and their identities.

This can have far reaching consequences on intersex people's self-conception, relationships with right-wing family members, friends, and colleagues, and their interactions with medical and mental health institutions and practitioners. Effects on self-conception can go as far as to impact physical health. Intersex Human Rights Australia refers to an Australian study 'showing rates of psychological distress similar to "a comparison group of chronic somatically ill persons", thus showing "markedly increased distress"' (Carpenter, 2019, para. 11).

Therapists and practitioners may read this article as a detailed exposition of the direct attacks against intersex people; it is important for anyone who wants to serve intersex

people's mental health and wellbeing to understand the way they are attacked so they can build interventions that directly address both healing and resilience against those attacks.

Two-Sex Hegemony and Interphobia

The two-sex hegemony is an ideology that recognises only two sexes: women and men. It comprises seven imperatives:

1. Exclusion imperative: There are exclusively and exactly two sexes. Who is not one, is the other.

2. Attribution imperative: Every human being must belong to exactly one of these two sexes.

3. Body or genital imperative: Sex has a physical basis; genitals describe the respective sex beyond the shadow of a doubt.

4. Naturalness imperative: Sex dichotomy exists by nature. Women and men exist by nature. Sex is innate.

5. Eternity imperative: The once-made sex assignment (mostly prenatal) is valid for life. Past, present, and future (also post-mortem) are either exclusively male or exclusively female (Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

6. Congruence imperative: Sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual practice, and desire must be intelligible and in agreement (Butler, 1990).

7. Heteronormativity imperative: The two sexes desire and complement each other. Frequently used metaphors for this are pot-lids, key-locks, and the like (Hartmann et al., 2007).

The norm of the exclusive two-sex hegemony is a dominant power dynamic that can only function if all lifestyles and bodies that do not conform to these imperatives are suppressed, marginalised, adapted, surgically interfered, pathologised, and made invisible. The two-sex ideology therefore goes hand-in-hand with interphobia, cissexism, and queerphobia (Dietze, 2003).

What Is Interphobia?

Human bodies are diverse, including biological sex characteristics at chromosomal, hormonal, gonadal, and genital levels. This diversity of human bodies collides with the assumption that there are only and exclusively two sexes. Interphobia is an ideology that assumes that humans exist and should exist only as biologically distinct men and women. If the variations of sex characteristics are outside the male or female 'normal range', a whole spectrum of

discriminatory practices can be applied. They aim to adapt bodies authoritatively to male or female sex norms. In essence, this is about the prevention and erasure of intersex bodies that are judged to be deficient. This can range from abortion and prenatal hormone ‘therapies’ to operations on infants, children, and adolescents, sterilisation and the lifelong administration of hormones to the systematic invisibilisation of intersex life realities combined with lifelong pathologisation, tabooing, and discrimination in all areas of life that demand a binary sex classification. All this amounts to a massive negation of sex diversity. Part of interphobia is also the functionalisation of intersex people for superordinate purposes—often in the enmity of nature versus nurture—while at the same time disappearing their realities and ignoring and dismissing the political demands of intersex organisations.

The fight against interphobia is about self-determination over one’s own body and about a criticism of medicine that asserts itself against the enforcer of the two-sex hegemony, often flanked by the judiciary.

An important aspect of interphobia is the perpetuation of a two-sex ideology. By erasing or otherwise destroying any sexes outside the binary norm, society functionally ignores any irritant that could threaten its ideology. This applies also to psychology and therapeutic practices that can function as another site of harm for intersex people.

Interphobia is closely linked to cissexism, a structure that systematically privileges cisgender and discriminates against transgender people. Cisgender people identify with the sex assigned to them at birth, while transgender people do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. In a cissexist society, the gender binary is considered ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ with the underlying assumption that all people are cisgender, readable by their genitals. This is called ‘cisnormativity’ or ‘cissexual assumption’ (Serano, 2007). Cissexism and interphobia differ significantly in that interphobia is primarily directed at sex/the body, while cissexism is primarily directed at gender identity. Other central aspects are linked to this, such as questions as whether medical interventions are self-determined or externally imposed, the point in time (directly after birth or in adulthood), whether people have ‘gender affirming surgery’ or a ‘forced sex change’, and others that cannot be deepened here.

Historical Outline of Intersex Pathologisation

The discrimination of intersex people has a long history in the Western world, and aspects are outlined below. Around 1800, the gonads—testicles and ovaries—became the determining factor of the ‘true sex’ due to their reproductive function. At that time, ‘hermaphroditism’ represented the ‘indifferent’ origin and the first stages of development leading to ‘completely’ differentiated sex characteristics (Klöppel, 2014). Consequently, natural scientists and physicians declared the male and female ideal type to be the ‘most perfect’ and to be the highest in the sequence of development. ‘Hermaphrodites’, on the other hand,

embodied the 'most imperfect' and 'most primitive' degree of differentiation in this new concept of polar sex differentiation.

This understanding of 'hermaphroditism' was 'embedded in the theorem of "higher development"', which assumed a hierarchical arrangement of living beings. To the theorem belonged the assertion that the sex difference was all the more pronounced the higher a species was settled in the development sequence of the living beings and the higher culturally a "human race" was' (Klöppel, 2014, p. 108). Conversely, this meant that the less differentiated gender dimorphism was, the more 'primitive' and 'uncivilised' a culture or 'ethnic group'. From this point of view, 'hermaphroditism' was also regarded as 'degeneration' from a developmental biological point of view, as 'the "primitive" echo of an evolutionary process already undergone' (Dietze, 2003, p. 22). 'Hermaphrodites' were degraded to biologically 'imperfect' and 'useless' existences and to pathological 'malformations' (Klöppel, 2014, p. 108), and furthermore, reproductive 'hermaphrodites' would foster the 'degeneration of the race'.

In the historical genesis, the direct connection between racism, social Darwinism, the binary constructs of sex and gender, and interphobia is evident under the premise of perfecting the purpose of the species.

HOW DOES THE FAR-RIGHT DEAL WITH INTERSEX PEOPLE AND TOPICS?

The far-right has different strategies in dealing with intersex people and topics, all of which are interphobic. It is, as in other fields, anything but stringent in its argumentation; sometimes the same thinkers use contradictory arguments. In many right-wing articulations it also becomes clear that there is a great ignorance and erroneous use of terms. For example, Conchita Wurst, who is neither intersex nor transgender, is described as an 'indefinable hermaphrodite being' (Reichel, 2014, p. 47) or 'bearded hermaphrodite in evening dress and high heels' (Tögel, 2014, p. 216) (translations by author).

These examples show not only a lack of knowledge and ignorance, but also the dilemma of the right when it comes to intersex topics: the reference to 'nature' does not work because intersex bodies are 'natural'. The right-wing Catholic journalist Birgit Kelle points out this dilemma in her most recent publication *Mother Animal*: 'The inability of intersexuals to clearly strike at one of the two sides is, in contrast to all the fluid-queer-pseudo-whatever-genders, not due to crazy self-definitions, but to a physical disposition. Congenital. As a biological anomaly. Such a thing exists' (Kelle, 2017, p. 46). (The terms 'intersexuals', 'intersexuality', 'hermaphrodites', and 'transsexuals' are used in this text either only as quotes or if they reference a specific medical or right-wing way of thought. They are criticised by large parts of the respective communities [Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2009].) The playing-off of LGBTQA+ policies against intersex people will be dealt with again at the end of this article.

In the following, the individual strategies of the far-right in dealing with intersex topics and people are analysed. One strategy simply consists of ignoring intersex people altogether, a second in denying, a third in pathologising, a fourth in paternalism, a fifth in conjuring up the ‘polarity’ of man and woman, a sixth in direct attacks on intersex people, and a seventh in functionalising intersex discourses for sexist and LGBTQIA-hostile politics.

Ignorance

Ignorance of intersex people is by far the most frequently used strategy. Since intersex people are simply not mentioned, only ‘man’ and ‘woman’ appear as the only possible sexes. Naturally, this impedes any critical analysis—what is not there cannot be analysed.

Denial

Many of Kelle’s fellow extremists prefer to deny the facts in favour of their two-sex ideology. It is a more offensive strategy than ignorance.

The German Catholic fundamentalist Gabriele Kuby, an important theorist in the European context, whose main work *The Global Sexual Revolution* has been translated into several European languages, explains: ‘God ... created humans in his image as man and woman because he called them to love. Rebellion against God cannot be more radical, cannot be more insane than when humans deny that they are man and woman’ (Kuby, 2007/2014, p. 59). Elsewhere, she states that ‘every body cell is genetically male or female’ (Kuby, 2012, p. 154).

The politician and former FPÖ presidential candidate Barbara Rosenkranz states in her publication *MenschInnen*, the standard work of the Austrian right on gender relations: ‘The self-evident must not be confirmed: that human beings exist as man and woman’ (Rosenkranz, 2008, p. 46). The Austrian journalist Werner Reichel practices the same refusal to accept reality, for example, when he approvingly quotes a newspaper article in several of his writings in which it says: ‘Biologically [there are] the two sexes, manifested by different chromosomes, gametes, hormones’ (Reichel, 2015, p. 106, 2014, pp. 45–46).

Pathologisation

Following the history of intersex pathologisation outlined above, many right-wingers recognise intersexuality in contrast to the two previously mentioned strategies, but they pathologise it.

When dealing with intersex people, Rosenkranz (2008, p. 41) writes of ‘prenatal developmental disorders’ and ‘no distinct sex characteristics’, Werner Reichel (2015, p. 106)

fabulates of ‘deformities and anomalies’, and Kuby (2012, p. 216) simply states: ‘Intersexuality is a collective term for biological-bodily diseases’. The German plant physiologist, evolutionary biologist, and regular author of fascist journals Ulrich Kutschera is downright obsessed with intersexuality and writes, among other things, about ‘defective prenatal processes’ (Steudel, 2016), ‘malformations or design errors’, and ‘aberrations of ontogenesis’ (Kutschera, 2016, p. 114).

Also, the Austrian psychotherapist, neuroscientist, and Catholic fundamentalist Raphael Bonelli joins the pathologisation at a symposium of the ‘Demo for All’ 2016 in Stuttgart, when he talks about intersex people: ‘A developmental step was not successful’ (DemoFürAlle, 2016, 36:17). At another point in his lecture, he makes fun of the intersex former ski racer Erik Schinegger and attests him a ‘defect’ (37:07). In all these articulations, the continuity of interphobic thinking within the framework of the theorem of higher development through sex dimorphism becomes apparent.

This thinking takes us directly to the medicalisation and interference with what is considered ‘normal’ human development by the medical apparatus. Intersex Human Rights Australia states:

Guidelines for medical interventions relating to intersex variations are scarce, though increasing in number, and contested. A 2006 clinical ‘consensus’ statement is frequently cited as a foundational text for the clinical management of intersex traits, but is contested as it facilitates medical interventions for psychosocial rationales ... ‘consensus’ statements attempt to construct clinical norms based on an appeal to clinical eminence. (Carpenter, 2020, Intersex specific guidelines section)

Interphobic thinking becomes institutionalised; turning two-sex hegemony into medical standard of care practice.

Paternalism

A specific variant of pathologisation is paternalism towards intersex people.

Bonelli attests a ‘severe suffering’ (DemoFürAlle, 2016, 36:23) to intersex people, Rosenkranz speaks of ‘mostly ... mental discrepancies’ (Rosenkranz, 2008, p. 41), and Kuby projects a ‘severe fate for a human being and his parents, if an anomaly of the biological sex characteristics is present’ (Kuby, 2012, p. 157).

At no point are those who write in this way concerned about the interests of intersex people and their organisations—these are ignored. The reactions to those who advocate self-determination for intersex folks are aggressive. In a perfidious twist, Rosenkranz states: ‘Intersexuals, transvestites and transsexuals are instrumentalized by gender advocates to create an “ambiguity of gender”’. On the other hand, there is less concern for the well-being of those affected’ (Rosenkranz, 2008, p. 132). Bonelli speaks in rage: ‘That ideologists abuse

these suffering people in order to consolidate their ideology is a mess!' (DemoFürAlle, 2016, 36:26).

Both such announcements are a classic mechanism of projection: in fact, it is these right-wingers that paternalistically instrumentalise and abuse intersex people for their very own purposes, as will be explained in more detail below.

Conjuring up the 'Polarity'

The flip side of the pathologisation of intersex topics is the conjuring up of the 'polarity' of man and woman, which shimmers on the horizon as a utopia of happiness and a place of longing. Corresponding announcements by right-wing ideologues quickly slide into the kitschy esoteric. The evangelical brain researcher Manfred Spreng (2014, p. 73) means 'to recognize the benevolent intention of the Creator, which ingeniously created this interlocked and optimally complementary polarity of the human couple. They are inevitably dependent on each other in their complementarity'. Austria's most famous 'Identitarian' Martin Sellner (Martin GI, 2014, 11:49) vlogs about man and woman: 'Both are complementary polarities, the one without the other is nothing'. His comrade Willinger (2013, p. 22) was also struck by an epiphany: 'But we have realized the true nature of the sexes and like to dedicate ourselves to them. We want to be real men and real women'. He contrasts in his main work, *The Identitarian Generation*, 'the strong and the beautiful sex', which in the good old days 'joyfully united', while in the 'degenerated', modern society only listens to the 'alliance of the hermaphrodites..., the league of the halves, the union of nothing' (p. 21). Kuby throughout invokes the apocalypse of the 'deconstruction' (Kuby, 2012), 'denial', and 'dissolution' of binary gender.

Accordingly, 'danger' emanates from all those who are not 'right' and 'real'. Sellner (Martin GI, 2013, 5:46) vividly sketches the horror scenario: 'Women are becoming ever more masculine and men ever more feminine. Basically [everything] melts together ... into such an androgynous, formless, undifferentiated being'.

An example for the interlocking of different strategies can be found with the Catholic fundamentalist and psychiatrist Christian Spaemann, who compulsively tries to sort intersex people into a dichotomous logic: 'Intersexuality is a rare disorder in the development of the sex organs ... These clinical pictures are also based on the duality of sex and gender ... Most of them can therefore be assigned physically and psychologically quite clearly to the spectrum of man or woman. They find their desired place, yes, protection, in the binary gender order' (Spaemann, 2018, p. 2). This view of intersex people, which is very frequently encountered in medicine in particular, is also a form of denial through pathologisation, the polarity of the sexes is conjured, and the view on intersex people is paternalistic.

Why is sex and gender polarity so important to the far-right, why does it feel so threatened by ways of being in the world that deviate from normative bipolarity, and why do some of its theorists deny that intersex people exist?

The Relevance of Bipolarity for the Far Right

In essence, the driving force for conjuring polarity is less interphobia—which is rather an effect—but the ideology of the ethno-national community and the imperative to reproduction. The far-right glorifies the ethno-national community and endows it with an intrinsic value. The people should be strong, they should grow and reproduce. Demographic developments are followed closely and the phantasm of an alleged ‘extinction of the Germans/Europeans’ is extrapolated. In order to avert this development and strengthen the ethno-national community, reproduction is of paramount importance. If the sexes are defined as fundamentally different, the only way to discover each other is through desire. Against this background, the invocation of the polarity of man and woman under the conditions of the heteronormativity imperative is central. Thus, Sellner (Martin GI, 2014, 8:30) says: ‘There is an essence, namely that the two poles man and woman attract each other, and that life arises from the union of these two poles. And this polarity, this fruitful difference, which is greater and deeper than only on the level of human being, goes on’. Elsewhere he says: ‘It is always about this primordial sexual attraction between polarities’ (10:16). If the polarity is lost, in this logic also Eros dies, which in turn is important for the reproduction and thus the preservation of the ethno-national community. Willinger imagines this Armageddon for true believers: ‘And so female men and male women met each other and yet knew nothing what to do with each other’ (Willinger, 2013, p. 21).

A dissolution of the polarity of man and woman leads, according to ethno-nationalist logic, not only to the destruction of the ‘true nature of the sexes’ (Willinger, 2013, p. 22), but is identical with the ‘death of the people’. The preservation of a rigid two-sex hegemony is therefore extremely relevant for the functioning of far-right concepts of social order. The ‘unity mania and identity compulsion’ (Stögner, 2017, p. 158) of the right in this case affects all those who on the different levels—sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual practice, and desire—defy conventional logic, including intersex people. These are indications of a harmful development of the German people and stand in the way of the overriding goal of the ‘pure’ and superior ethno-national community.

Social Darwinism

Population policy here is not only a quantitative matter, but also a qualitative one; it has a social Darwinian and eugenic component. Carlos Wefers Verástegui writes in the New Right magazine *Blaue Narzisse* that ‘what beats the species cannot survive the struggle for

existence. These include above all the hermaphrodites, since the hermaphrodites do not belong to the whole species according to their nature. Humans are not hermaphrodites' (Verástegui, 2017, *Eine Errungenschaft der techno-szientistischen, postmodernen Zivilisation* [An achievement of the techno-scientific, postmodern civilisation] section). The German fascist Björn Höcke, chairman of the AfD parliamentary group in the Thuringian state parliament, said at the 2014 Christmas meeting of the Young Alternative Baden-Württemberg: 'The synthesis of man and woman, this lived polarity of life, is about something else: It is about the fact that this polarity is the germ cell of the higher development of mankind' (Hans-Erich Kraft, 2014, 41:52). As mentioned before, the idea of 'higher development' is also part of interphobia and has a long history. It has always stood for the exclusion of intersex people, who are constructed as 'sick', 'abnormal', 'degenerate', 'inferior', and not able to survive. The racist-nationalistic and eugenicist longing for a pure and healthy allegorical (ethno-national) body demands such individual bodies, whose only function is to preserve the whole and which must therefore be binary (Lehnert, 2010).

The FPÖ-Institute for Education writes: 'In the end, the destruction of identities is to be achieved—in society and culture as well as on an individual gender level. The goal of "gender mainstreaming" is nothing other than the creation of the "new man"' (FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, 2013, p. 136). The phantasm of the creation of a 'new man' by 'the genderists' is not only a very basic defence against egalitarianism, but the Damocles sword of 'genderlessness' and 'indifference' in this logic also means a step backwards in the development of the 'race'. The androgynous 'new man' symbolises degeneration for the far-right. Intersex people are therefore desired neither as children nor as (biological) parents. Social Darwinism and eugenics are likely reasons for the sterilisation of many intersex people.

Direct Attacks

The other side of conjuring up the polarity is the mockery of and direct attacks against intersex people as the sixth strategy. Regular attacks, intimidation, and degradation of intersex people occur in the media and in the political arena. The 'Organization Intersex International (OII) Austria' states that the 'topic is ridiculed' and that there is a wealth of 'degrading comments on articles on intersex or the third sex entry in online forums of various Austrian media' (VIMÖ, personal communication, May 30, 2018). For example, the FPÖ-related online portal 'Unzensuriert' writes about the best-known intersex person in Austria, who filed the complaint for the 'third option': 'An Upper Austrian who cannot or does not want to decide whether he is a male or female' (unzensuriert.at, 2016, para. 1). This applies in a very similar way to the situation in Germany, where the person who brought the action on the 'third option' before the Federal Constitutional Court explains in an interview why they want to remain anonymous: 'I don't want to hide ... but also I don't want to be exposed to the mood that is now being created against us, especially from the right' (Fokken, 2017, para. 19).

There are also verbal as well as physical assaults against recognisable or suspected intersex people in physical space, 'where it can be assumed that the attackers have a far-right background' (VIMÖ, personal communication, August 16, 2018).

The attacks find their counterpart in institutional action. The Austrian Ministry of the Interior instructed the registry office in Steyr to deny the aforementioned intersex person the registration 'inter'. Instead, 'diverse' was to be specified as the gender. This abuse of authority was explicitly against the ruling of the Constitutional Court from June 2018 (Brickner, 2019).

Since the summer of 2019, attacks on intersex people in Germany from the parliamentary sphere have intensified considerably because of a nuisance parliamentary political manoeuvre called a 'minor interpellation' from the AfD. Implicitly, two minor interpellations brought into question the competence of one of the few intersex persons living openly in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019a, 2019b). This particular individual is known for offering peer counselling to other intersex people, making the attack even more effective against the intersex community as a whole. In these interpellations, medical power of definition over intersexuality is demanded and, in this connection, inquiries are made as to how public money is spent. Another minor interpellation from March 2020 demands details about people who have registered their civil status as 'diverse' since the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court of December 2018 or who have requested that their civil status be deleted (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020a). The questions are so detailed that some of the answers are refused by the government 'for reasons of data protection' (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020b, pp. 7–11). These minor interpellations are part of a larger project in which the AfD creates enemy lists.

There are many more examples, though often the attacks do not reach the public because the attacked are not famous and neither have the resources to reach a wider public audience nor the financial means to legally defend themselves. Since this strategy is directed against specific intersex people, it is very powerful and contributes significantly to perpetuating the invisibility of intersex realities, as coming out is considerably more difficult due to the dangerous situation.

Functionalising

For some years now, the far-right has been using the made-up German word 'Genderismus' to refer to various emancipatory aspirations that revolve around equality, reproductive rights, and sexual, gender, and family diversity. In order to legitimise its fight against 'Genderismus', it is in need of argumentation and must prove that 'gender' is somehow bad and evil. To do this, it uses the 'John/Joan' case, which is discussed in the next section. This example allows a deeper understanding of why the far-right associates 'gender' with 're-education' and 'ideological experiments' and to understand the specific interphobia associated with a particular theorisation of gender. This seventh and last strategy could be called

functionalisation of a specific discourse on intersex topics for sexist and LGBTQIA-hostile politics.

The next section explores in depth the way this functionalisation developed and how it has affected the discourse in feminist thought as well as in the far-right.

DAVID REIMER AND THE SEX-GENDER DEBATE

Reinterpretation by the Far-Right

The John/Joan case is world-famous, widely discussed, and one hardly finds a text on gender from the conservative side to militant neo-Nazism that does not implicitly or explicitly refer to it. This applies not only to the German-speaking world, but also to the whole of Europe, North America, and presumably beyond.

For the first time in German-speaking countries, right-wing media took up and reinterpreted the case in 2005 with an article by the antifeminist journalist Bettina Röhl in the magazine *Cicero* (Röhl, 2005). One year later, the head of the political department at the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Volker Zastrow, copied most of Röhl's work and poured it into a long article (Zastrow, 2006a) as well as a short book with this and another article (Zastrow, 2006b). In 2008, Barbara Rosenkranz introduced the topic in *MenschInnen* to the Austrian context. Like almost everyone else before and after her, she copied Zastrow's work. To this day, there has been hardly any change in the argumentation, and many of the right-wing pundits mentioned so far refer to Zastrow, Kuby, and/or Rosenkranz. Comradeship among right-wingers: Bettina Röhl (2015) quietly complains about this sexism in an article from 2015 that she is not quoted, but does not call it 'sexism'. Kuby quotes Zastrow in detail and writes of 'spiritual gender conversion' (Kuby, 2012, p. 60); the FPÖ official handbook speaks of 'ideological gender conversion' (FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, 2013, p. 135)—a term that can be traced back to Zastrow's 'political gender conversion' (Zastrow, 2006b) and which has since become an integral part of German neo-Nazi and conservative jargon. In the anthology *Rape of human identity. About the fallacies of gender ideology*, Zastrow is almost treated like a guru (Späth, 2014), and Kuby's works are described as 'pioneering' (Seubert, 2014).

David Reimer

'John/Joan' is the scientific pseudonym for David Reimer. He was born in Canada in 1965 as Bruce Reimer, as a boy. When he was circumcised at the age of eight months, there was an accident, and his penis was scorched. His parents sought advice and contacted John Money, a psychologist in Baltimore. He was convinced that psychosexual development was essentially determined by education and suggested that Bruce be educated as a girl. From then on, Bruce

was Brenda. The experiment failed dramatically. Brenda never felt like a girl. After he was enlightened about his story at the age of 14, he lived as a man and called himself David Reimer. Again, for understanding: John/Joan, Bruce Reimer, Brenda Reimer, and David Reimer are all the same person. David Reimer has revealed his identity himself.

He was neither intersex nor transgender. He was assigned a clearly male sex at birth, castrated by the medical establishment, and feminised by psychiatry. Twelve years after these horrible procedures, he was enlightened about his history and decided to live as a man. In order to do this, he had to undergo hormone treatment, operations, examinations, and interviews again (Butler, 2001). The doctors treating him this time were Keith Sigmundson and Milton Diamond. The latter is a sexologist and reproductive biologist and was Money's competitor for many years. Diamond rejected the theory of the social imprinting of gender identity and was convinced of the biological, especially prenatal-hormonal determinacy of gender and gender identity (Klöppel, 2008).

Reimer was twice in his life exposed to intersex treatments and transition surgery at a time when these procedures were comparatively new and untested. This is one of the reasons why his case is so closely linked to the treatment of intersex people and transsexuals in the Western world. The fame is further enhanced by scientific theories about gender, which particularly have been developed on inter- and transsexual people and are highly contested.

Controversies: Nature vs. Nurture

As a rule, John Money is portrayed as the person who represents the nurture thesis. This is wrong. Money did *not* introduce gender to separate the physical body from the social construction. On the contrary, he used gender to shape the idea of sex: a female gender should have a female sex, and vice versa, he assumed that this female sex would generate a female gender.

In Money's work, nature is produced in authoritarian conformity along a two-sex system, and it remains the irreversible basis for nurture—we are dealing in Money's thinking with an essentialisation of gender and a quasi-biological determination: The 'right' body should produce the 'right' behaviour. Money was 'not interested in a power-critical deconstruction of gender roles, but in securing their uniqueness', as cultural studies scholar Gabriele Dietze (2006, p. 51) explains. He wanted to create a very specific version of femininity or masculinity, which was 'successful' when gender role expectations were not only achieved, but exceeded. Accordingly, his actions were also motivated by heterosexism: Money was fixated on the production of 'functioning' sex organs for heterosexual penetrative sex, and this requires dimorphic bodies that are perfectly complementary.

Political Instrumentalisation

Money's essentialist constructivism was always attacked by biological essentialists. The latter argue—not surprisingly—that masculinity and femininity reside very, very deeply in genes, hormones, and brains.

In 2004, Reimer committed suicide due to difficult living conditions: his brother had died two years earlier of medication poisoning under unexplained circumstances, he had debts due to a bad investment, was threatened with unemployment, his wife had separated from him, and he was depressed. Although all this has to do with Money's treatments, it can't be narrowed down to them (Barlow, 2014).

One year after Reimer's suicide, the article by Röhl appeared and since then his story has been interpreted again and again by the conservative and far-right. For them, the John/Joan case is the original scene for 'human experimentation' above everything that has 'gender' on it. It provides the blueprint for essentialist argumentations and against a constructivist understanding of gender. John Money is stylised as 'one of the scientific pioneers of today's gender theory' (Rosenkranz, 2008, p. 41) and 'one of the most important mentors of the genderists' (Reichel, 2015, p. 101), while Kutschera speaks throughout of 'moneyism' (Kutschera, 2016). For Kuby (2012, p. 59), he plays 'a key role in gender ideology, which proclaims the free choice of gender'. David Reimer becomes a deterrent example of what happens when this theory becomes practice. 'One of the first victims was Bruce Reimer', writes Reichel (2015, p. 101), and Bonelli (DemoFürAlle, 2016, 41:20) adds: 'This [suicide] happens when people are stripped of their identity as a man or a woman'.

David Reimer has meanwhile become a self-referential system with the short formula 'Gender = Violence'. When the far-right rages against 're-education' and 'gender experiments' (FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, 2013) and agitates against intersex and trans rights, sex education in schools, reproductive rights, gender mainstreaming, marriage for all, or the questioning of traditional gender roles, this always happens against the backdrop of this analytical grid. 'Gender theory' became a signifier for torture, the name 'David Reimer' is the epitome of the cruelty of the so-called 'gender ideologues', and for a good 15 years the analysed publications have quoted his case as the ultimate proof of the triumph of nature over nurture.

The Term 'Gender'

The actual conceptual history of gender is a different one. At first, gender was a lexical-grammatical category (Hof, 1995). Money introduced the term 'gender role'—understood as gender-typical behaviour, feelings, and inner conviction—into sexology and psychology in contrast to the nature thesis (Klöppel, 2008). In the 1960s, there was then a 'conceptual differentiation of the gender concept into gender identity and gender role' (p. 77) by the psychoanalyst Robert Stoller and the sociologist Harold Garfinkel, both members of a team

dealing with the case management of intersex infants. What is interesting about this constellation is that 'the inventors of the category gender all worked as psychological experts for surgical and endocrinological sex cutting' (Dietze, 2006, p. 60). None of the three included asymmetrical gender relations or a questioning of the two-sex hegemony in their analyses, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the 'category of gender ... was not at the service of problematizing cultural gender dimorphism, but ... served to produce it' (p. 60).

Gender and Feminism

The second European women's movement then entered the scene at the end of the 1960s with an exactly opposite agenda. Feminist critiques took up the gender category, but from the outset interpreted it differently from Money, Stoller, and Garfinkel, namely, power-critically and anti-essentialist. Feminists were concerned with the decoupling of body, identity, expression, and desire, with a critique of biological determinism and with the rejection of male domination (Dietze 2006; Klöppel, 2008). Intersex and trans movements as well as queer studies in particular criticised the totalitarian compulsion of the binary sex and gender system.

Rosenkranz (2008, p. 46) writes: 'So John Money failed with his experiment. ... And yet his views are today ... celebrating the greatest successes—as the basis of the new gender mainstreaming doctrine'. Additionally, Reichel (2014, p. 8) states: 'Nevertheless, gender ideologists still refer to this inhuman experiment'. That's wrong, especially when speaking about the present. It is true, however, that some very early feminist works in West Germany in the 1970s refer uncritically to the John/Joan experiment, such as Alice Schwarzer (1975/1977) and Ursula Scheu (1977), who cite it as a 'prime example of the effectiveness of gender-specific socialization' (Klöppel, 2008, p. 72). Schwarzer criticises here already in differentiation to Money that 'our allegedly equal society leaves no room for intermediate ways: Either we are clearly a woman or we are clearly a man. ... Anyone who doesn't fit into one of the two drawers falls out.' This was at a time when the failure and painful procedures of the experiment were not yet known. Systematically concealed from the right is the almost antagonistic objective of the respective theorists and the fact that feminist critiques of 'genital corrections' in infancy have been formulated since the mid-1980s (Klöppel, 2008), as have criticisms of John Money. Dietze (2006, p. 58) writes self-critically for gender studies of the 'birth of the gender concept from the spirit of the scalpel' and a 'ballast of this inheritance between heteronormativity and surgical sex correction'. It also becomes clear from the history of gender and its feminist appropriation that the concept has undergone various shifts in meaning which cannot be dealt with here (Dietze, 2006; Hof, 1995).

Allies and Opponents of Intersex People

The John/Joan case symbolises the brutality of sex and gender norms and shows the reductive interpretation and rigid binary gender models in medicine and sexology that were upheld and enforced by John Money *as well as* by Milton Diamond, Robert Stoller, and Harold Garfinkel. They were merely concerned with proving a certain theory of psychosexual development; they were driven ‘by the idea ... of being able to dissolve psychosexual development into elementary cause-and-effect relationships, to which the vision of controllability is always tied’ (Klöppel, 2008, p. 82). The models that were developed offered a limited understanding of the psychological and sexual development of human beings, one that supported an essentialised view of sex, bodies, and gender identity.

David Reimer was instrumentalised as an object of study and his sad death is again instrumentalised for another purpose, namely, the defence of equal rights for intersex and trans people, women, homosexuals, and bi-/pansexuals. Singling out the John/Joan case while at the same time ignoring and silencing the voices of intersex people, can lead to ignorance and denial of the established medical violence and systematic human rights violations by the Western medical community. For example, Rosenkranz (2008, p. 44) who writes: ‘The practice of sex reassignment was discontinued because of an extremely critical scientific report’. This cheeky lie conceals the medical violence against intersex people that continues to this day. The political right has never shown allyship with intersex people and/or their demands. The ignorance towards the demands of intersex organisations while simultaneously functionalising David Reimer is also evident from the fact that the case management for intersex newborns as well as the gender concept was not a direct result of the John/Joan case at the time, but had already established itself in the second half of the 1960s (Klöppel, 2008).

The simple truth is: David Reimer might still be alive in a society that welcomed and valued ambiguity and diversity and rejected the assumption of only two sexes.

RELENTLESS STANDARDIZATION: IN DEFENCE OF DOMINANCE

Anxiety of Identity Loss

Debates about sex and gender have always (also) been held on the back of intersex and trans people, notions of ‘real’ masculinity and femininity have been and still are decisively (co)regulated by intersex and trans discourses. The two-sex hegemony particularly affects intersex and transgender people; furthermore, the relentless standardisation exerts pressure on everybody. The actual diversity of bodies, sexes, and genders does not merge into a binary world—not a single body corresponds to this ideology (Voß, 2010). Every human being fails the norms, units of measurement, scales, and standard values that this society considers ‘ideal’. For preachers of nature, fans of the two-sex hegemony, religious zealots, and ethno-national fighters, the acceptance of the more complex ambiguity of both sex and gender

would be a catastrophe. Hence, gender fundamentalists use different strategies to maintain the two-sex ideology: ignoring, denying, pathologising, paternalistic patronising, conjuring up the polarity of man and woman, direct attacks, and the functionalisation of completely different issues for one's own political agenda. All these strategies are interphobic and are legitimised with a strange mixture of creation theology and the scientific naturalism of the life sciences.

Within the analysed right-wing milieus, the sex and gender dichotomy is strictly controlled and any looming ambiguity, blurring of borders, and dissolution of traditional boundaries and certainties is aggressively fended off. The argumentation against a constructivist understanding of gender is directed against the expansion of gender habitus and the dissolution of unambiguous roles, attributions, and responsibilities. 'It is enough for them [humanity] that men are men and women are women, without intermediate stages, transitions, androgyny or hermaphroditism' (Verástegui, 2017, *Zerstörung der Chancengleichheit durch Gleichmacherei des Ungleichen* [Destruction of equal opportunities through egalitarianism of inequality] section) is stated in the New Right *Blaue Narzisse*. John Money could not have formulated it more beautifully. There is relentless fighting against all those who are not 'real', 'right', and 'normal' enough, and the fight against 'genderism' always entails implicit or explicit interphobia and cisnormativity. In fact, it is the attackers themselves who want to re-educate and impose their sex and gender ideology onto the whole world. They project their violence onto others. The invocation of the normative power of biology and the dogmatisation of dimorphism leads to the repression of sex and gender diversity. Right-wing extremism functions here as a particularly aggressive intensification of social gender orders ('higher development', division of labour, etc.) and absurdly couples biological determinacy with individual freedom and, analogously, the pluralisation of sex and gender with impunity and coercion.

Reasons and motivations for the far-right are fear of losing one's identity, an assumed dysfunctionality of the desired ethno-national community in the dissolution of seemingly secure boundaries, the establishment of binary sex and gender regimes as the norm, and the pathologisation and eradication of deviations. If right-wing thinkers allowed the questioning of naturalised gender relations, other ideological constructions such as 'race', 'people', nation, or class would also suffer. They long for unambiguousness, orientation, clarity, identification, belonging, and a reduction in complexity. On the level of individual psychology, their own psychosocial adaptations to the gender binary are also expected of everybody else. Anyone who cannot or will not comply with this binary injunction provokes projections and aggression.

Racism, Masculinity, and Antisemitism

In their contradictory frenzy, the far-right usually oscillates between the fear of a dissolution of the sexes and androgyny on the one hand and feminisation on the other. Either way, masculinity is threatened. The right-wing populist author Andreas Tögel (2014, p. 233) describes ‘hermaphrodites’ as a ‘contemporary variant of the Frankenstein monster’, and David Reimer stands specifically for the emasculation of an originally ‘intact’ masculinity—Kutschera (2016, p. 6) speaks of a ‘tormented castrato’—and every sexist’s primal fear of having his penis cut off. The preferred use of the story of John/Joan suggests that the cruel re-construction of sex can best be explained by a body that has been operated from ‘biologically male’ to its opposite, rather than by bodies that have been ‘adapted’ from an ambiguous to an unequivocal state, the artist and theorist Joke Janssen (2009) analyses.

The fetishism of masculinity by the far-right and the associated discourse of sovereignty and masculinist counter assertion do not only follow an identitary need, but are also specifically linked to racism and antisemitism. While the feared loosening of traditional gender roles is imagined as an internal threat, migration is seen as an external danger. Against this background, the cultural pessimistic lamentation by the right about ‘decadence’ is a problem for them because it makes the man the victim of social feminisation processes and thus contributes to his weakening—he can no longer defend the people and the nation. Markus Willinger (2013, p. 21) complains: ‘You have deprived men of their masculinity. They were brought up to be weak cuddly bears who lack any energy, any courage to be strong, in one sentence: the will to power’. Werner Reichel (2015, p. 124) hallucinates that the ‘increasingly feminized European society has created a vacuum through gender policy, among other things, which is rapidly filled by the members of the pre-modern cultures surrounding Europe’. In the right-wing projection loops, ‘Islamic hordes’ savage Europe and implement the ‘great replacement’ of the autochthonous population of Europe by refugees and migrants. (Within the far-right, there is not only fear of Islam, but also envy of—again a projection—virility lived out unfiltered.)

The assumption of a weakening by ‘feminisation’ and ‘genderisation’ is just as much a conspiracy ideology as the assumption of a ‘great replacement’. The underlying phantasm assumes that a sinister foreign group, which is extremely powerful and acts in secrecy, orchestrates the increased immigration of refugees and at the same time renders society incapable of fighting from within. In such rhetoric, far-right proponents use antisemitic codes with a centuries-long history in the German-speaking world. This antisemitism is sometimes also personalised and attached to George Soros. The figure of the Jews as an ‘anti-national people’, who systematically work on strategically undermining the nation and want to destroy everything completely is invoked here. Also, antisemitic gender images are brought into play; male Jews were feminised by antisemites, while female Jews were portrayed as viragos. The sex and gender dimorphism is based on exclusion (Imperative 1): Whoever is not male is female and vice versa. Something third destroys this binary logic (Holz, 2000). Being a man or

a woman is also destiny; the struggle against gender transgression and for distinct gender roles also has an antisemitic history in the German-speaking context (A.G. Gender Killer, 2005).

To ward off this destruction and save the Occident, the fetters of the female society must be loosened, and virility glorified. The US-American neo-Nazi Jack Donovan, a favourite of the German New Right, demands accordingly a 'Reconquista of masculine ideals and ... a repolarization of the sexes' (Verlag Antaios, n.d., para. 1). This is not available with 'oversensitivity', 'snowflakes', 'cucks', 'soy boys', and 'betas', i.e., all the ultimately non-viable softies and sissies. What is longed for is an ethno-national masculinity and femininity that, in its polarised complementary logic, 'embody the ideal of a solidarity that applies exclusively to the sworn ethno-national community and seals itself off xenophobically from the predestined other' (Stögner, 2017, p. 157).

Capitalism and Two-Sex Hegemony

The dissolution of gender difference is deplored by the right as an expression of social decay. Allegedly, society disintegrates into nothing but egoistic individuals, and an alleged compulsory individual liberation and self-realisation is criticised since this is supposed to enhance exploitation. This makes it clear why this whole debate and the fight against so-called 'genderism' exists at all. Against the so-called 'gender madness' as an individualistic ideology in a cold and alienated world, the warmth of the family and the identity of the ethno-national community are placed in a transfigured way, where each has its own place. It promises the dissolution of social contradictions and conflicts of interest. Within the framework of capitalist crisis discourses, the sex and gender binary is upheld and defended.

The right-wing policies are reactions to real successes; for example, homosexual rights, feminist policies, a growing recognition of trans and intersex persons, and the like. These are put into a false causal relationship with neoliberal developments, which have led to the erosion of orientation patterns believed to be certain.

It's a nonsense assumption that the best way to fight against domination and exploitation is with 'unambiguous' men and women. The opposite is true: since its inception, capitalism has functioned very well within the framework of the sex and gender binary, whether this is the valorisation of heteronormative desire structures, the non-remuneration of care work, the comprehensive discrimination of transgender people in professional life, or the erasure of intersex bodies. Anyone who is against exploitation necessarily fights against the sex and gender binary norm—side by side with men, women, trans, and intersex folks. An adequate analysis of capitalism is helpful for this.

Antifascism

The previous explanations shed light on the intrinsic entanglement of interphobia with racism, antisemitism, nationalism, social Darwinism, two-sex ideology, heterosexism, cissexism, and sexism. The strategies analysed for dealing with intersex topics in the far-right are by no means limited to this spectrum, but can also be found in the mainstream; in particular, the attacks against gender mainstreaming with reference to the John/Joan case. Mainstream society and the far-right maintain a relationship that sets mutual themes and influences each other. In essence, it is about leaving the fiction of a binary polarity of sex and gender untouched.

Finally, a danger should be pointed out which can arise when dealing with only one discrimination under ignorance of other discriminations. If one reads through the texts of the far-right, such as the conspiratorial transatlantic network 'Agenda Europe', which is primarily recruited from clerical fascist organisations and individuals, one can see in their programmatic manifesto 'Restoring the Natural Order' an interesting theorisation of intersexuality vs. transgender. It states that intersex people are in a deplorable situation (strategy of paternalism), who are not supposed to have rights, but a place in society. In a paradoxical twist, the far-right tries to manage the(ir) 'problem' that intersex people are in fact 'natural' and simultaneously question by their sheer existence the two-sex hegemony. This version is three quarters of a page long. Three pages follow this on the subject of transgender identity, in which it is explained that transgender people are the 'Trojan horse' (Agenda Europe, n.d., p. 53) with which the 'Gender Ideology' is spread. They fear a landslide victory which is to be nipped in the bud: 'If there is first a "third sex", to which marriage must not be denied for reasons of "gender justice" and then of course not "the right to a child", then there will be many other sexual identities in the whole queer diversity of the sexes, which will claim the "other sex" for themselves' (Kuby, 2012, p. 157). This naturalising justification can also be found in Birgit Kelle's work, as explained above: 'intersexuals' are by 'nature' 'okay', transgender, however, an allegory 'against nature' and thus 'evil'. This playing-off of different marginalised groups against each other is a popular strategy of the far-right. It is not only dangerous because it stabilises domination, but also nonsensical: dimorphism with its congruence assumptions of 'right' femininity and masculinity makes life difficult for both intersex and trans people.

Whoever deals with the far-right is well advised to know their inner logic. The John/Joan case is well known and of high importance within right-wing and conservative milieus with their creative and agenda-filled reinterpretation of the facts—one can also call it 'fake news'—but hardly at all within left-wing, queer, and antifascist circles. This should change. Interphobia with its intersecting entanglements should be made a central field of discussion.

In Closing: Asserting Inter-Affirmative Therapy

Interphobic constructions are crucial for therapists and practitioners to understand so their impact may be understood as part of an inter-affirmative therapy. The latter will ultimately understand human development as non-hierarchical and therefore not value any particular expression of human bodies over any other. Pathologisation and 'fixing' is contraindicated to healing, and if therapy is to be good, it needs to know about the realities of the clients' lives. Therapists who are accustomed to supporting clients to deal with an oppressive gender dichotomy must widen their view of gender to include sex when working with intersex people.

Medical and mental health settings are not automatically safe for intersex people; instead, they are often the sites of harm. Working with intersex clients frequently involves dealing with medical and mental health trauma. This institutional site of trauma not only requires extra sensitivity from practitioners, it also requires knowledge about the debates in psychology and sexology outlined above.

Intersex organisations and independent advocates have long called for intersex-affirmative therapeutic approaches.

Both the worldwide Malta Declaration (Organisation Intersex International Europe, 2013), a joint statement by 34 activists representing 30 intersex organisations from all continents at the third International Intersex Forum in Malta, and the Australian and Aotearoa/New Zealand Darlington Statement (Darlington Statement, 2017), a joint consensus statement by Australian and Aotearoa/New Zealand intersex organisations and independent advocates, call for an end to the paternalistic and medicalised interference with intersex people's bodies and mental health. Trust-building processes might include offering affirmation of intersex people's bodily autonomy, seeking consent prior to engaging in any physical contact or mental health interventions, and creating a climate of empowerment where the client is able to assert boundaries, make requests for care strategies, and co-design trauma-informed interventions that reflect their lived experiences of their self-conception and their sense of embodiment and self.

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