

Understanding the Terms

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In this article today I am simply defining terms that have been used widely in the public these past several weeks. I have noticed that many do not understand the terms and are using them out of context. A clearer understanding of these terms should facilitate a healthier discussion and hopefully better treatment of these individuals.

First, let me say that I have never been so torn regarding writing an article. Should I write or should I not write? This year I celebrate twenty consecutive years of writing in the Nassau Guardian and have never felt this way about writing on a topic. On one hand I feel really compelled to write about this topic but the atmosphere is so saturated with vitriol, misunderstanding, negative politics, confusion, etc, regarding the Constitutional Referendum and the sex topics, that I am not sure how this article will be interpreted or used. Secondly, this discussion should not be linked to the referendum debate. The bills are simple about equality between male and female citizens of The Bahamas which I fully support without reservations. Thirdly, I am not a medical doctor or an expert in all of these topics. But I feel with my training, experience, research and writing skills, I should share on these topics if only to help us begin to understand them better. Although I have decided to write this article, I will not publish it the newspaper (at least not at this time) but only share it via email and on my website. Doing this also allows me to be more extensive and not be limited to a certain amount of words. It is a long article so be patient and read right to the end.

I will seek to clarify and define the terms transgender, transsexual, intersex, hermaphrodite, transvestites, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, LGBTQ. I will seek to give a simple, accurate definition of each term with little comment.

TRANSGENDER:

The term transgender has been the most misused and most misunderstood word within the past few months in our country. One expert says that “For transgender people, the sex they were assigned at birth and their own internal gender identity do not match.” Bahamian psychologist, Dr. Edrica Richardson, an American certified marriage and family therapist, who teaches the subject of sex and gender identity in a Florida college states that “Transgenders are not homosexuals by definition. Transgender persons feel they are psychologically born in the wrong body. Yet they are fully biologically male or female. Transgender is not about sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to sexually. Transgender is about gender identity—whether or not one biologically feels like a male or female.” It is also imperative to understand that a transgender person is not intersex or transvestite. Note the definitions later in this article.

As indicated earlier many are confusing transgender with homosexuality (gay). Joanne Herman, retired transgender advocate in the United States, wrote an article in the Huffington Post in August of 2011 entitled **“Some Transgender People Are Not Gay.”** I think it can give some clarity on the topic and why help us understand why so many, even transgenders and homosexuals themselves, are so confused. Here’s the quote:

“Back in the 1990’s, lesbian and gay organizations started adding transgender people to their missions. It seemed to be a reasonable expansion — transgender people face many of the same prejudices that gay people do.

But much like the general population, most people in the gay and lesbian community did not understand that, while the prejudices were similar, the underlying issue is quite different. Many still don’t understand this.

So when the missions were expanded, many gays and lesbians innocently continued saying that their organizations “serve the needs of all gay Americans.” Many still do say this.

The result is that many Americans who have heard the word transgender think it means another kind of gay.

The problem is that some transgender people are not gay. Take Chaz Bono for example. Chaz came out as a lesbian in 1995 because, living as a female since birth and being attracted to other females, that made him a lesbian in society’s eyes. It took Chaz until 2008 to realize that he was truly a man. Now, living as a man who is in a relationship with a woman, Chaz is considered by society to be straight.”

TRANSSEXUAL:

Often the terms transgender and transsexual are used interchangeably by some. As stated earlier a transgender is biological male or female who feels the opposite. A transsexual is one who goes through the sex re-assignment surgery to match the gender identity. Note that this is different from homosexuality or lesbianism. Transgender is about what someone feels or think he or she is. Being a homosexual/lesbian is about whom or what gender one is attracted to.

TRANVESTITE:

The Wikipedia Online Dictionary states that a transvestite is a “person who sometimes wears clothes traditionally worn by and associated with the opposite sex; typically a male who cross-dresses occasionally by habit or compulsion.” One author states that Transvestite/Cross-dressers don’t associate with the LGBTQ community and don’t see themselves as anything but straight/heterosexual. Understand clearly that some transgenders dress to match

their gender identity (the way they feel sexually) and not their biological sex. These are not transvestites.

INTERSEX:

The term intersex is relatively new in medical science. Centuries ago medical science used the word hermaphrodite. Now it is correctly called intersex. One dictionary states that “**Intersex**” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. Medline Plus online states “Intersex is a group of conditions where there is a discrepancy between the external genitals and the internal genitals (the testes and ovaries).” Further definition is intersex is an infant born with tissues from both sex organs. The older term for this condition is hermaphroditism. This is of Greek origin. The Greeks taught the persons with both sex had mysterious powers.

We have all heard about **Sex Chromosomes**. It is imperative to understand that chromosomes determine sex. They are known as “X” and “Y” Chromosomes. “XX” is the female genotype. “XY” is the male genotype. More explanation: “In humans the sex chromosomes comprise one pair of the total of 23 pairs of chromosomes. The other 22 pairs of chromosomes are called autosomes. Individuals having two X chromosomes (XX) are female; individuals having one X chromosome and one Y chromosome (XY) are male.”

This helps us to understand the topic of intersex. Thus I cannot help but share the entire explanation from **Medline Plus**. It helps us to understand the complexity of the subject. Here it is:

“Intersex can be divided into 4 categories:

1. 46, XX intersex
2. 46, XY intersex
3. True gonadal intersex
4. Complex or undetermined intersex

Each one is discussed in more detail below. Note: In many children, the cause of intersex may remain undetermined, even with modern diagnostic techniques.

46, XX INTERSEX-- The person has the chromosomes of a woman, the ovaries of a woman, but external (outside) genitals that appear male. This most often is the result of a female fetus having been exposed to excess male hormones before birth. The labia ("lips" or folds of skin of the external female genitals) fuse, and the clitoris enlarges to appear like a penis. In most cases, this person has a normal uterus and fallopian tubes. This condition is also called 46, XX with virilization. It used to be called female pseudohermaphroditism. There are several possible causes:

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (the most common cause).

Male hormones (such as testosterone) taken or encountered by the mother during pregnancy.

Male hormone-producing tumors in the mother: These are most often ovarian tumors. Mothers who have children with 46, XX intersex should be checked unless there is another clear cause.

Aromatase deficiency: This one may not be noticeable until puberty.

Aromatase is an enzyme that normally converts male hormones to female hormones. Too much aromatase activity can lead to excess estrogen (female hormone); too little to 46, XX intersex. At puberty, these XX children, who had been raised as girls, may begin to take on male characteristics.

46, XY INTERSEX--The person has the chromosomes of a man, but the external genitals are incompletely formed, ambiguous, or clearly female. Internally, testes may be normal, malformed, or absent. This condition is also called 46, XY with undervirilization. It used to be called male pseudohermaphroditism. Formation of normal male external genitals depends on the appropriate balance between male and female hormones. Therefore, it requires the adequate production and function of male hormones. 46, XY intersex has many possible causes:

Problems with the testes: The testes normally produce male hormones. If the testes do not form properly, it will lead to undervirilization. There are a number of possible causes for this, including XY pure gonadal dysgenesis.

Problems with testosterone formation: Testosterone is formed through a series of steps. Each of these steps requires a different enzyme.

Deficiencies in any of these enzymes can result in inadequate testosterone and produce a different syndrome of 46, XY intersex.

Different types of congenital adrenal hyperplasia can fall in this category.

Problems with using testosterone: Some people have normal testes and make adequate amounts of testosterone, but still have 46, XY intersex due to conditions such as 5-alpha-reductase deficiency or androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS).

People with 5-alpha-reductase deficiency lack the enzyme needed to convert testosterone to dihydrotestosterone (DHT). There are at least 5 different types of 5-alpha-reductase deficiency. Some of the babies have normal male genitalia, some have normal female genitalia, and many have something in between. Most change to external male genitalia around the time of puberty.

AIS is the most common cause of 46, XY intersex. It has also been called testicular feminization. Here, the hormones are all normal, but the receptors to male hormones don't function properly. There are over 150

different defects that have been identified so far, and each causes a different type of AIS.

TRUE GONADAL INTERSEX--The person must have both ovarian and testicular tissue. This may be in the same gonad (an ovotestis), or the person might have 1 ovary and 1 testis. The person may have XX chromosomes, XY chromosomes, or both. The external genitals may be ambiguous or may appear to be female or male. This condition used to be called true hermaphroditism. In most people with true gonadal intersex, the underlying cause is unknown, although in some animal studies it has been linked to exposure to common agricultural pesticides.

COMPLEX OR UNDETERMINED INTERSEX DISORDERS OF SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT-- Many chromosome configurations other than simple 46, XX or 46, XY can result in disorders of sex development. These include 45, XO (only one X chromosome), and 47, XXY, 47, XXX - both cases have an extra sex chromosome, either an X or a Y. These disorders do not result in a condition where there is discrepancy between internal and external genitalia. However, there may be problems with sex hormone levels, overall sexual development, and altered numbers of sex chromosomes.”

Wow! That’s heavy

BISEXUAL:

“Bisexuality is romantic attraction, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior toward both males and females, or romantic or sexual attraction to people of any sex or gender identity; this latter aspect is sometimes alternatively termed pansexuality.” *Wikipedia*

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

“Sexual orientation describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person (for example: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual), while gender identity describes a person's, internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or someone outside of that gender binary).” *Wikipedia*

LGBTQ:

Many know the meaning of the acronym LGBTQ. However, many do not know what “Q” stands for.

- L**—Lesbian (female homosexual)
- G**—Gay (male homosexual)
- B**---Bisexual
- T**---Transgender
- Q**--Queer or Questioning

“The “Q” can stand for **Questioning** and/or **Queer**: Questioning refers to individuals who are unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Queer is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities excluding heterosexuality.” *Heartland Alliance International*

MY LAST WORDS:

We do have all of these kinds of individuals in our country. I could remember as a teen my father sharing with us about intersex persons. That’s over fifty years ago. Homosexuality is not in the closet anymore in our country. Individual homosexuals might be. However, transgenders and transsexuals are still in the closet. Could it be because they fear that they will not be treated fairly? Today we do have a more open society. Technology and free speech are opening the floodgates of information. This is good. More people are feeling free to express themselves or their views openly. We must learn to live harmoniously with all of these individuals and views. This is a part of a pluralistic, free, democratic society. The healing of our society is not by the removal of these individual but instead embracing the difference among us. We do not have to “accept” or “agree” with the behaviors, but we can be civil and respect the rights of individuals. All human beings in The Bahamas have the right to be treated with respect, fairly, access to services, protection, free from harm and harassment.

Christians have a mandate to love unconditionally. If there is anybody who should show unconditional acceptance and unconditional love, it should be the Christian. All people are deserving of this even if we disagree with their lifestyle or behavior.

It is imperative also that Christians do not insist that the constitution is a moral document or religious document. It is to be a neutral, secular document. Yes, there are certain principles that are morally or spiritually parallel. However, the constitution is a tool for civil society to function by allowing equity for everyone.

My appeal to Christians is that we avoid making the gospel toxic. I appeal to everyone that we make the gospel attractive by our loving lifestyle and not a pain in the butt.

Read the following articles for more insight.

- ["A Constitution for Everyone"](#)
- ["I Am Happy We are Not a Christian Nation"](#)
- [What If?](#)
- [Homosexuality and The Church](#)

Let’s love one another.

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