

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# Bullying and Intersex, Sex and/or Gender Diverse People

Within the Family, Schoolyard, Workplace, the Media and by those We Depend Upon

by Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H.

Article appeared in Polare magazine: April 2011 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



If you are a young person being bullied at school because you may be sex and/or gender diverse it can seem overwhelming.

**I**ntersex, Sex and/or Gender Diverse (I.S.G.D.) people includes people who are intersex, transsexed, transsexual, transgendered, cross-dressers, androgynous, without sex and/or gender-identity or people with culturally specific sex and/or gender differences. No one person can be I.S.G.D., it is a phrase to describe a collective of groups of people.

***... when families are not supportive it can be devastating to that person and undermines the whole basis of their confidence in life.***

Let me start this article by saying that bullying is endemic in all walks of society as it is part of human nature but a civilised and egalitarian society attempts to eliminate it as much as humanly possible. Marginalised groups like I.S.G.D. people, however, can be particularly targeted for bullying within the greater society.

Australia as a country has a rich and diverse cultural history starting with its varied native Aboriginal tribes. The limit to how sex and/or gender diversity was traditionally dealt with is beyond my knowledge. I have, however, met Aboriginal people who were ashamed of their sex and/or gender diversity and others whose family and communities accepted them fully.

The difference often seemed to be the extent to which the person was willing or able to educate their communities. Since family and country is so important to native Australians, indigenous intermediaries can often be used to help those communities learn about a person's differences, aiding acceptance of that person as a valued human being.

The white face arriving in Australia was, however, a different story. Many of those early settlers were uneducated people who sought moral guidance from the Catholic Church, which has persecuted I.S.G.D. people for over a hundred years. The Pope and Catholic Church still castigate and isolate I.S.G.D. people today.

As my dear friend norrie, who is a Christian, says about that kind of Christianity, "That doesn't sound like any Jesus I have read about".

Later as other cultures arrived they brought their own prejudices and superstitions about I.S.G.D. people. While our cities are melting pots where many 'out' I.S.G.D. people seek cultural safety and acceptance in a metropolitan atmosphere, the bush, when it is redneck country, can be scary and dangerous, physically, psychologically and socially for "out" I.S.G.D. people.

Some families are amazingly supportive of their sex and/or gender diverse relatives and when that happens it certainly makes life easier for those people and helps them to be confident in life. But when families are not supportive it can be devastating to that person and undermines the whole basis of their confidence in life. Sometimes families treat those people as the family runt of the litter to vent their frustration on. While an individual can seek help to educate their family, if in the end nothing changes then leaving that family unit may be an option to consider. All parents need to learn it is their job to listen more than to speak.

The workplace can also be a difficult place for 'out' I.S.G.D. people because some companies promote scapegoat mentalities or ruthless competitiveness. Whilst there are some laws to promote equality in the workplace for I.S.G.D. groups of people in some states, they are wholly insufficient at the moment. Last year the Australian Human Rights Commission held a public consultation to extend the Sex Discrimination Act to include discrimination on the grounds of sex and/or gender diversity. The recommendations it made to the Federal Attorney General's office, however, have yet to translate into any real laws.

If you are a young person being bullied at school because you may be sex and/or gender diverse it can seem overwhelming. Since you have no economic power or choice to walk away you can feel trapped. It is good to make allies, confide in the school counsellor, talk to a teacher, contact a support group, or tell your parents. If you are disabled tell your carer.

Lobby the school Head to put in place a sex and gender equality policy. If all this fails go into a local solicitors' office and ask them to represent you in taking out a case for negligence against the school on a pro bono basis. Remember life has truly amazing things to offer you when you grow up and it is so well worth hanging in there.

Those who may seem to have the power over you as child will not have that when you are an adult.

Disabled and older I.S.G.D. people who are either dependent on visiting carers, or those living in an institution, can also be subject to bullying by those they depend on. This may include physical or sexual abuse, extortion or being taunted because of their differences. Name-calling or being ostracised in an enclosed, small community can lead to deep depression and feelings of not being able to escape the abuse.

Another problem in this area is that client/staff ratios can be stretched by government or private contractors running such facilities so that clients with special needs often do not get the care they deserve. In these cases alerting a social worker to assess the situation is probably the best course of action by the person or on their behalf so they may be moved or the situation addressed.

Domestic violence and bullying of people who are sex and/or gender different is something I have seen a lot of over the years. The individual or groups of people may end up with low self-esteem due to their personal or group experiences. That can sometimes mean that sex and/or gender diverse people can enter into relationships with partners who are less than respectful.

They may put up with that behaviour because they have deep-seated feelings that they really do not deserve anything more or fear they could not get another partner. It often takes a long time for the realisation to sink in that they might be better off without that relationship or that the couple needs some professional help.

Remember love is what you do, not what you say. Watch more than you listen. Good partners are those that add to your life, respectfully, kindly, helpfully and positively and do not drain it like vampire.

The media and journalists also constantly bully I.S.G.D. people. Untrue stories are written but the publication knows the person cannot afford to sue. Articles can be made to put a slant on I.S.G.D. people to make them appear suspicious, disreputable, dishonest or perverted, just to sell more publications.

Radio and television programmers frequently prohibit I.S.G.D. people's voices in the media, particularly on religious programmes.

It has to be said that the greatest bullies of I.S.G.D. people today in Australia are the State and Federal governments. The lack of laws to protect I.S.G.D. groups of people and help them to fit harmoniously into society is nothing less than outright prejudice and an abuse of human rights.

There are, however, many of us lobbying to change that and we are having success piece by piece. Each change is the result of many years of work but you can be assured we will keep fighting for all I.S.G.D. people's rights. Each new generation will bring another crop of campaigners who will continue the cause.

Bullying within the I.S.G.D. groups is also a problem. Many intersex people make Internet postings saying how trans people have a choice about their identities, which is offensive, as they do not. Trans people can be insensitive about the trauma that some intersex people go through, too. This very journal constantly refers to I.S.G.D. groups of people as transgender which many of us are not and are profoundly offended by this lack of sensitivity. Transsexual people often demean transgender people and transgender people do the same to cross-dressers. It is also untrue that gay people are more sensitive to I.S.G.D. people. They are not, and are extremely offensive at times. While some I.S.G.D. people may be gay the majority are not.

So many in the medical profession, psychologists and counsellors have profoundly dedicated themselves to helping I.S.G.D. groups in the past but many have abused them as well.

Some clinicians unfortunately do not listen to their patients' concerns, are dismissive, and force unwanted treatments on people and withhold treatments they want. As a child I was locked away in an institution in a small room one and half metres by two metres for years on end and experimented on for years. I survived and prospered. In my youth I was bullied by a ruthless psychopath of a psychiatrist who nearly drove me to my grave because I could not be what he thought I should be. I survived that too. I survived and prospered regardless of what happened to me. I won. The labelling of I.S.G.D. people as mentally disturbed is unacceptable and prejudicial. We are different and to those professional fraudsters who propagate such rubbish I say, "Deal with it, Charlatan!"

Bullies, of course, need victims. They can spot a victim across a crowded room so do not behave, hold yourself or speak like a victim. Some people turn themselves into victims by the way they present themselves. Hold your head up high. Be proud of who you are. That does not mean sharing your confidence with everyone in the supermarket but it does mean being stronger than the bully thinks you are. Many I.S.G.D. people are stealth about their sex and/or gender diversity publicly because they fear bullying. Some are unable to be stealth, and some of us just do not want to be. If you are threatened with violence remove yourself from that situation immediately, go to a safe place and seek help. Know where the safe places are, lobby for safe places, and create safe places.

The future can be bright for I.S.G.D. groups of people but only if those people themselves are part of making it so - if that's you, it's up to you. Thoughts of suicide are frequent in people being bullied for any reason and they should be talked about with caring professionals who can help you. If you are being bullied get help.

## **Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H., B.H.Sc., N.D.**

**From Tracie O'Keefe's website:** 📧 Tracie O'Keefe is a qualified and registered clinical hypnotherapist (A.S.O.C.H.A., psychotherapist, counsellor, mental health professional and trainer, working from a naturopathic perspective in Sydney, Australia. She trained at a post-graduate level with the National School of Hypnosis and Advanced Psychotherapy in London, U.K. U.K.C.P.-recognised school). Her degree and doctorate were earned at the American Institute of Hypnotherapy in the U.S.A. and issued in co-ordination with the Bureau for Private Post-Secondary and Vocational Education in California. She has



been a family and couples therapist, a sex therapist and addictions therapist for many years and a qualified naturopath and medical herbalist, who trained in nutritional medicine with the Australian Institute of Applied Sciences. She holds a Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree in Complementary Medicine from Charles Sturt University. She is also an internationally published researcher, author and editor of the following books. [Read more about Dr. Tracie O'Keefe at her website](#)

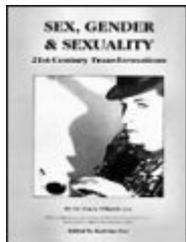


**Trans-X-U-All: The Naked Difference**

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1997)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0952948209.

**From Google Books:** This fresh and concise work takes an exciting look at the world of transsexuals. It explains the whole gender reassignment process from start to finish and includes deeply moving stories written by transsexuals themselves, their lovers, families and friends. Scientific, factual, informative, it provides, in accessible language, a comprehensive guide to the world of transsexuality.



**Sex, Gender & Sexuality: 21st Century Transformations**

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1999)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 0952948223

**From Google Books:** This book dispels much of the mysticism around physical sex, gender constructs, and the diversity of sexuality. As well as considering gay, lesbian, transsexual and transgendered identities, it also looks at the intersex groups, such as hermaphrodites, and people who identify as androgynous or as being without sex or gender.



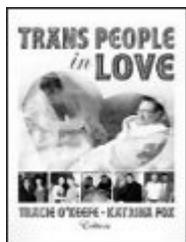
**Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity**

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Jossey-Bass (2003)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0787965471

**From Google Books:** *Finding the Real Me* is an extraordinary collection of real-life stories told by a wide-range of sex and gender diverse people. These healing tales of struggle and transformation reveal just how creative, resourceful, and adventurous the individuals in this community can be and also helps to bridge the gap between ignorance and understanding. As each incredible story unfolds we become part of the author's journey to self-acceptance and join the celebration of their new life. Page by page, we laugh, cry, and learn to appreciate these wonderful courageous people and the road they walked to be their true-selves. *Finding the Real Me* is a landmark book that encourages us to embrace diversity, to never fear our differences, and to remain always in awe of our amazing possibilities.



**Trans People in Love**

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Routledge (2008)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 0789035721

**From Google Books:** *Trans People in Love* provides a forum for the experience of being in love and in relationships with significant others for members of the trans community. This honest and respectful volume tells clinicians, scholars, and trans people themselves of the beauty and complexity that trans identity brings to a romantic relationship, what skills and mindsets are needed to forge positive relationships, and demonstrates the reality that trans people in all stages of transition can create stable and loving relationships that are both physically and emotionally fulfilling.

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and

service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.