

Bodily Rights and Gifts: Intersex, Religion, and Human Rights

Dr Susannah Cornwall

University of Exeter

Abstract:

Intersex, a physical state where an individual's body cannot be classified as male or female, has recently begun to be recognized legally in jurisdictions including Australia and Germany. Even where legislation has not yet been passed, recommendations and human rights discourses (such as the recent discussion of intersex by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and the Council of Europe's resolution on intersex children's rights to physical integrity) seem increasingly to be acknowledging that the lack of specific protections for intersex people to date has been a problem. Religious communities, especially those which teach that binary sex is intended by God, may be particularly challenged by intersex. However, they also contain resources for constructing rich and robust accounts of personhood. In this paper I note some of the ambiguities around human rights language in this area, and ask whether Christian and Muslim constructions of life as gift from God may present a different way to promote intersex people's physical and spiritual integrity and wellbeing.