

**TRANSLATING IDENTITY CONFERENCE**

# DSD: Another Acronym or an Important Leap Forward?

By Jacsen Callanan

This year marked the fourth annual Translating Identity Conference hosted at the University of Vermont. Leaping to a two-day conference in late February with events hosted on three days, the entirely student-run

tiation. It is the medical term that many are hoping will be used in place of hermaphrodite. Hermaphrodite, or pseudo-hermaphrodite, has long been used by doctors and the medical community to describe persons born with sex characteristics

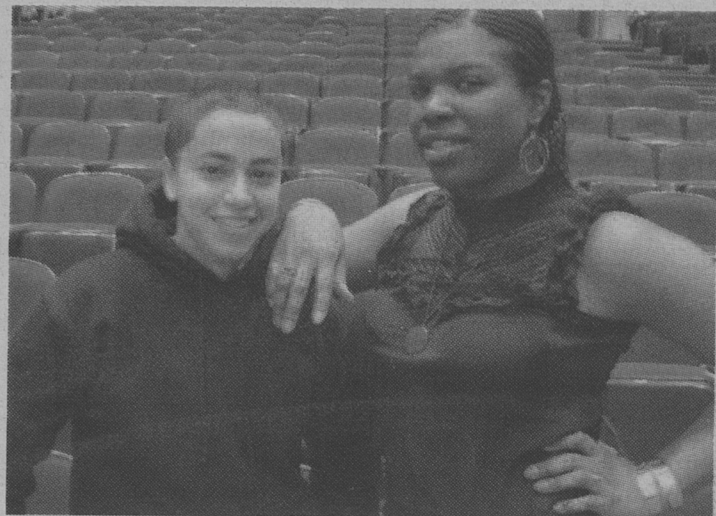
sible in humans, so the term was deemed inaccurate by the intersex community. Unfortunately, the medical community, for the most part, did not take up use of the term intersex and so the shame has lived on.

The new term DSD has been better received by the medical community and also by some people already in the intersex community. Some people hope that DSD will replace not only hermaphrodite but also intersex. However, it is unlikely that "intersex" will disappear altogether, because of the activist community who views these conditions as variations of nature and sees the term intersex as an identity to be proud of.

It is possible, though, that DSD can help all intersex people, as Emi Koyama discussed in her speech. First of all, the term DSD carries a much less negative stereotype which will allow families who have children with these conditions to create less secrecy and shame in their child's lives, and adults with these conditions will be able to live lives with less secrecy and shame as well. Secondly, being labeled as having a disorder may help people living with these conditions to be seen more in the disability spectrum, which can help them gain more rights and access to better medical care and services. Lastly, with the advent of DSD, intersex activists hope that there will be more space for education about these conditions in medical schools and among doctors, so that intersex people can be seen as just another variation on nature, and not freaks in need of medical treatment. DSD may be the step to help intersex people translate their identity to the rest of the world.

For more information about the Translating Identity Conference please contact [tic@uvm.edu](mailto:tic@uvm.edu). For more information about intersex topics see [www.intersexinitiative.org/](http://www.intersexinitiative.org/) or [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org). ▼

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event was a huge hit. People came from all over the nation to attend a plethora of workshops and speeches to learn, discuss and debate about gender and gender identity topics.

The keynote speaker, Emi Koyama, is a well-known queer and intersex activist who runs the Intersex Initiative out of Portland, Oregon. She started much of her intersex work as an intern at the Intersex Society of North America and in 2003 founded the Intersex Initiative, a national patient advocacy organization for people born with intersex conditions. Emi's work extends into many other areas of activism including disability, sex workers, survivors, trans-feminism, and general multi-issue anti-oppression work.

In the keynote speech, Emi addressed the newly emerging acronym DSD which stands for Disorders of Sexual Differen-



Top: Presenters Gael Guevara and Julienne Brown. Bottom: Keynote speaker, Emi Koyama

that are not cut-and-dried male or female. This term has long been a source of shame for the people in the community, and it was hoped that the creation of the term "intersex" in the 1990's would allow people who embraced this identity to live more openly and free of shame. Additionally, the word hermaphrodite is not a biologically correct term for people born with these conditions, because it means animals that are both male and female simultaneously and who can reproduce with themselves. This is impos-



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