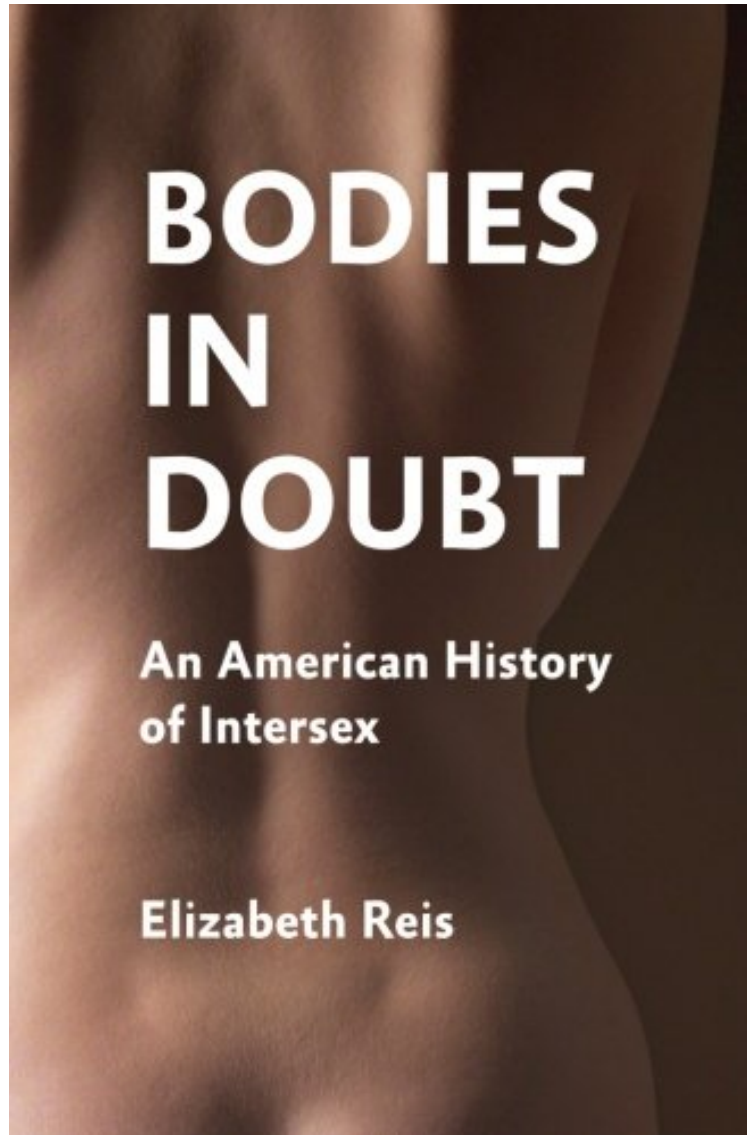


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Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex

Elizabeth Reis

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Elizabeth Reis : Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fantastic History!By AdenilThis book provides a fantastic history of the Intersex movement. For those who think that Intersex conditions are a modern invention, you will have to prepare to have your world rocked. Reis provides a great analysis of medical documents dating back to early American history. By examining these documents she positions Intersex patients not as abnormal, but as a normal human difference. She

examines the cyclical nature of doctor's views on Intersex conditions, then provides her own thoughts on how the 21st-century deals with these conditions. All in all, a five-star book.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. *inane and cultural arguments for blended gender not new* By Chuck Furnace I thought this book would be just about hermaphrodites, but its scope is the much larger question of societal response to things not well understood. The historical chapters paint a not so pleasant picture of a lack of compassion and acceptance. New medical understanding have softened attitudes, as has American society's melting pot culture. Recently, a woman who had a partial sex change operation into a man has been in the news having babies. This book ignores sensationalism for solid research and well written prose. Bravo! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *excellent* By amy nichole gill Excellent history of ideas, concepts, and misinterpretations of intersex history, I highly recommend this book. Covers from about the 18th century to the present.

What does it mean to be human? To be human is, in part, to be physically sexed and culturally gendered. Yet not all bodies are clearly male or female. *Bodies in Doubt* traces the changing definitions, perceptions, and medical management of intersex (atypical sex development) in America from the colonial period to the present day. From the beginning, intersex bodies have been marked as "other," as monstrous, sinister, threatening, inferior, and unfortunate. Some nineteenth-century doctors viewed their intersex patients with disrespect and suspicion. Later, doctors showed more empathy for their patients' plights and tried to make correct decisions regarding their care. Yet definitions of "correct" in matters of intersex were entangled with shifting ideas and tensions about what was natural and normal, indeed about what constituted personhood or humanity. Reis has examined hundreds of cases of "hermaphroditism" and intersex found in medical and popular literature and argues that medical practice cannot be understood outside of the broader cultural context in which it is embedded. As the history of responses to intersex bodies has shown, doctors are influenced by social concerns about marriage and heterosexuality. *Bodies in Doubt* considers how Americans have interpreted and handled ambiguous bodies, how the criteria and the authority for judging bodies changed, how both the binary gender ideal and the anxiety over uncertainty persisted, and how the process for defining the very norms of sex and gender evolved. *Bodies in Doubt* breaks new ground in examining the historical roots of modern attitudes about intersex in the United States and will interest scholars and researchers in disability studies, social history, gender studies, and the history of medicine.

"An excellent book that treats its subject matter with care and respect, and which encourages critical thinking about the issues discussed." (*American Journal of Human Biology*) "In telling her story, Reis has also provided an excellent collection of illustrations. For scholars and medical students, this pleasantly written history provides an opportunity to view examples of these unusual problems." (*Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*) "An excellent history of attitudes towards intersex persons from the 17th century onward." (*Choice*) "Reis is an engaging writer... informative, engaging, and intersex supportive in tone. It might be most useful as a supplement in a university course on human sexuality or the psychology of gender. It is recommended to anyone interested in the sociological history of intersex, as one of the very few volumes on the subject." (*PsycCRITIQUES*) "Offers much-needed voice to the much-silenced lives of intersex Americans... Reis captures their stories as told by a plethora of masculinist and authoritative treatises, including autopsies, legal records, and medical texts, and to a less extent autobiographies." (*Health and History*) "Reis's study is useful precisely because of her broad brush it promises to broaden early Americanists' conversations about sexuality and gender and could serve useful not only in courses on the history of sexuality, but in classes on medicine, gender, the history of bodies, and disability studies. Many important moments in intersex history receive more detailed attention elsewhere, but the author's goals of extending our thinking about intersex to an earlier era and linking often separate moments and issues are well realized in this engrossingly readable overview." (*Bulletin of the History of Medicine*) "*Bodies in Doubt* is a thoughtful contribution to the historical analysis of intersex in the US and provides valuable insights for contemporary debates on the ethics of modern medical management of intersex. This linkage makes it an important read for gender scholars, medical historians and health professionals alike." (*Medical History*) "In the end everyone would be well served by a society that accepts, not merely tolerates, ambiguity. *Bodies in Doubt* is a valuable, important book because it teaches this lesson well." (*James H. Jones Journal of American History*) "*Bodies in Doubt* is the first work to present a comprehensive history of the ways that people and institutions have adjudicated the sex status of atypically sexed bodies in the United States. As such, it is a welcome addition to more contemporary studies of intersex and the history of sex/gender more broadly. Reis has meticulously researched a vast range of sources to discern instances in which physical bodies and/or inconsistently gendered behaviors have been the object of scrutiny, puzzlement, and often scorn. Reis' narrative is filled with rich detail and engaging questions that pull the reader along through an accessibly written monograph... One of the strengths of this work is that it presents such a wide range of cases that we can finally see that bodies, and social responses to bodies, really do vary not only across time and place, but even within any given context." (*Anne Enke in American History*) "Throughout *Bodies in Doubt* we can see how the understanding of intersex has reflected contemporary cultural concerns about sex, and abnormality." (*Daniela Crocetti Social History of Medicine*) "A thoughtful, engaging, and important addition to the

growing body of scholarship that explores the interrelated histories of medicine, sex, and gender." (Kevin Allen Leonard Pacific Historical)" Bodies in Doubt makes an important contribution to our understanding of early American cultural history. Reis's revelation of the ways that anxieties about perceived violations of sexual borders intersect with anxieties about racial 'mixing' should receive special attention... Reis's treatment of the overlapping medicalization of racial and sexual 'difference' also suggests the number of intersections with which one must reckon in telling the history of the medical management of atypical sex anatomies." (Ellen K. Feder International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics)" Bodies in Doubt undoubtedly deserves a prominent place in the growing body of literature on intersex history and politics. One of Reis's main achievements is that she places present-day intersex politics in the context of a long and complex cultural history. Moreover, her discussion sheds light on the American history of intersex before the 1950s, a period that has not yet received much critical attention... Reis has unearthed a wealth of new American case histories that not only make for interesting reading but also offer fresh insight into the cultural construction of intersex bodies. Bodies in Doubt is an excellent and highly engaging introduction to the medical and cultural history of intersex. In addition, by raising awareness of the multiple ways in which intersex relates to other markers of human experience such as sexuality, race, or class, Reis invites further investigation and opens up a set of questions that might well prove central to intersex studies in the future." (Jana Funke GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies)"A highly readable, novel, and interesting history on this topic. Bodies in Doubt helps readers see how the understanding of intersex has reflected contemporary cultural concerns about sex, abnormality, and civil society. It is not often you find a book that is so scholarly and yet so readable." (Alice D. Dreger, Northwestern University)From the Back Cover Bodies in Doubt traces the changing definitions, perceptions, and medical management of intersex (atypical sexual development) in America from the colonial period to the present day. The book breaks new ground in examining the historical roots of modern attitudes about intersex in the United States and will interest scholars and researchers in social and cultural history, gender studies, disability studies, and the history of medicine."In the end everyone would be well served by a society that accepts, not merely tolerates, ambiguity. Bodies in Doubt is a valuable, important book because it teaches this lesson well." Journal of American History"The authors goals of extending our thinking about intersex to an earlier era and linking often separate moments and issues are well realized in this engrossingly readable overview." Bulletin of the History of Medicine"An excellent book that treats its subject matter with care and respect, and which encourages critical thinking about the issues discussed." American Journal of Human Biology"Undoubtedly deserves a prominent place in the growing body of literature on intersex history and politics." GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies"An excellent history of attitudes towards intersex persons." Choice"Offers much-needed voice to the much-silenced lives of intersex Americans." Health and History"Reis is an engaging writer... informative, engaging, and intersex supportive in tone. It is recommended to anyone interested in the sociological history of intersex." PsycCRITIQUES"An important contribution to our understanding of early American cultural history." International Journal of Feminist Approaches to BioethicsAbout the AuthorElizabeth Reis is Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Oregon and author of Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex and Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England.