

Little Boxes

The Choice is yours.

You can get with this, or you can get with that.

You can get with this, or you can get with that.

You can get with this, or you can get with that.

I think you'll get with this, for this is where it's at.

The Black Sheep

X or Y? Pink or blue? Girl or boy? Socially, it's a binary system and there is no allowance for any other options. When it comes to gender, "Resistance is futile*." The two dominant belief systems, religion and medicine, have spoken. Those unfortunate square pegs who cannot or chose not to fit into the round hole are deemed to be either sinful, sick, or both. This binary hegemony remains despite scientific evidence of a wide degree of genetic and hormonal variation and the fact that this variation in genes and hormones creates diversity.

A perfect Storm

Toronto parents, David Stocker and Kathy Witterick decided to not tell people whether their baby, Storm, was a girl or a boy. In May, the story went viral and created a feeding frenzy that extended even to mainstream media shows like "The View," "ABC News," "NBC Today" and "Fox News." How, the guardians of the gender order ask, will others be able to categorize Storm when it comes time to check the box, "Male," or "Female?" More importantly, should they expect Storm to become big, strong, loud, dominating and aggressive? Or will Storm grow up to be small, weak, passive, and submissive? And what about the pronouns? It is simply too damned complicated to say a person's name all the time and all that extra effort of s/he him or her. Oddly, derogatory words like she'im, shemale and "chick with a dick" don't seem to pose a problem.

Perhaps a better question is why do we care? Storm is a baby. Babies eat, sleep, cry, make funny faces and poop. Developmentally, the key issue is the nature of the relationship babies have with their parents and care takers. Are the parents emotionally and physically present? Does the baby feel safe and unconditionally loved, or are they already learning that their needs won't be met, that they aren't safe, or that love is doled out conditionally?

The need to know

But people do care. The need to check the box, "Male" or "Female" never ends. At stores and airports, people want to be able to address you as "ma'am" or "sir." In letters, people want to address you as some variation of "Ms." Or "Mr." And Philadelphia's mass transit system, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA), believes that knowing whether someone is an "M" or an "F" is crucial to getting them to their destination safe and on time. Or perhaps SEPTA has another explanation for requiring passengers to have their monthly trainpasses and trail passes marked with an M or an F.

What would it be like?

How much of your life has been dictated by playing the script that society, your parents, and your peers set out for you? And at what cost?

What would it have been like to grow up in the kind of world David Stocker and Kathy Witterick are trying to create for Storm? What would it have been like to have been able to discover for yourself how you wanted to be without fear of censure for violating the gender rules? What would it be like to be accepted just as you are?

No matter what bits we have or don't have, no matter how we're shaped or how we're driven, we're all a bit unique. We all, in some way or other, have been a square peg forced through a round hole at some point or other in our lives. We've all paid the cost and could use some luvins to heal those bruises.

Imagine someone who knows you well saying, "You are a good person" or having a note from your mother saying, "Honey, I love you all the way to the moon, around the dumpster, and back. I'm proud of you. I'm glad you're mine." Maybe you don't have anyone in your life that showers you with love, or maybe you just can't feel their love right now because of the flotsam and jetsam of relationships or the power of your own self-hatred. Maybe your mom isn't really the note type or is so lost in her own fear and self-hatred that she has nothing to offer you. Maybe, ultimately, loving yourself is something you've got to learn to do on your own. If you need a little prompting on how to give yourself some luvins – here's a starter batch of words and phrases. Feel free to create your own self-loving masterpiece.

I love you. I know that you may not feel beautiful or successful, or even acceptable right now, but I see you. I see the beauty that shines like a diamond from your soul. It doesn't matter that you were told so many times and in so many ways that you weren't good enough and/or that you were too much. That bright, sparkling diamond that is you is still radiant. No matter how much you've been squashed by a world that sorts everything into little boxes, this or that, gay or straight, male or female, right or wrong, and good or bad, there is a part of you that has never been damaged, a part of you that is pure love and light. And that part shines through, even on the foggiest, most painful, most challenging days. Focus on your light and let it shine. Nurture your body with food that nourishes it and your soul with people and messages that let it breathe. No matter how hard it is, when you surround yourself with people that love you and understand you, you will find tears that wash away the pain and laughter that overcomes the fear. Keep following your inner truth and you will find the peace you have been seeking all your life. For now, remember that you are absolutely precious.

*Quote from Star Trek: The Next Generation

To ask Regina a question, propose a column topic, read about her approach to counseling, or check out her books and other writing, go to: www.ReginaSewell.com. You can read her blogs at www.ReginaSewell.Wordpress.com, <http://visionscounseling.wordpress.com>, and <http://possumcrossing.wordpress.com>. Her most recent publication, "Sliding Away" can be found in **Knowing Pains: Women on Love, Sex and Work in Our 40s**, edited by Molly Rosen.