

Amber Garland

The F Box

I am furious that there are always only two boxes: M or F. Pick one. Pick only one. Pick it or have it picked for you, for life. It is your most crucial definition.

I am joyous in my femininity, my voluptuousity, my round breasts, long hair in the wind, delicate graceful movements, the jewelry of seven queens and my ability to build masonry walls and clean up the mess.

I am furious that my lovers are stared at in women's rooms and stared at in men's rooms and that all that piss goes into the same putrid sewer instead of returning drop by drop, gently, into the Earth.

So many of my lovers have had scruffy chins three days after shaving and I have loved that scratchiness against my face. Whether they were men or women, or some other category never offered, is really none of your business; and whether they were born or chosen or would have chosen otherwise is a question each one of them would have answered differently.

I am joyous in my lesbian, two-spirit, dyke, queer, women's, womyn's, wimmin's, yin-shaped, Earth-toned, cunt and amazon sisterhood community; and I claim the right to be a mother, daughter, maiden, crone, nurturer, provider, healer, teacher, dancer, lover, father, brother or strong and gentle son if I choose to. Don't tell me I can't. By definition.

Define this: My friend was born a hermaphrodite. The parents were offered a choice: Do you want a boy or a girl?

They chose to leave the male genitals. Is he a man? How do we define gender? Are there only two? Would he, this same person, have been a woman if his/her parents had chosen to amputate the penis? Is he a woman now? Who should choose our gender for us? Parents? Doctors? Elders? Whoever knits the first pair of booties — pink or blue?

My friend thinks they picked wrong.

Define this: My brother and I both chose to adopt children.

They give us different names. I am a mother, they tell me. He is not.

Why? They tell me men can't be mothers because they can't give birth. I didn't give her birthday parties when she was four or five. I didn't put bandaids on her scraped knees. I adopted her when she was fifteen years old. They gave me a piece of paper. It says I am her mother. My brother will hold his little child, bottle feed it, take it to the playground. He will be far more mother than I by the bonding definition. There's no word for the adult who loves the individual child, no word for the daughter of my partner's ex-lover. There's no word for the relationship I have with the child crying in my arms.

Define this: I loved a lesbian who discovered he is a man. I made love with her as a woman. I made love with him as a man.

Am I bisexual now? Did I make love with a man? He still has a uterus.

Were we out of place at the gay 12-step meeting? Were we out of place at the straight 12-step meeting? Can he pray in women's space? Can he pray in men's space? Is my womanhood my culture? Is it his? He was raised woman. He will never lose that no matter how many male hormones he takes, no matter which operation he does or does not have. I will tell you this: twenty years later, I made love to my ex-lover. He was the same person who had been my lover. He says he has always been the same gender. Yet I know that I made love with a man. I know I made love with a woman before. I know neither one of us is incorrect.

You should see him. You would understand that he is male now. You should talk to him. You would understand that his thoughts were formed in a woman's mind and experience.

He checks between the boxes when they ask for gender. He is brave.

Is it necessary for everyone to know whether or not I have a vulva? If I have one does that make me a woman?

The boxes are very small. M or F. No time or space for explanation, exploration, no allowance for growth or change. They want an answer. And it's always the first question, sometimes even before "Name."