

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Dyed Chicks and Dead Prophets

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There's a new television series called *Touch*. It's about a small boy who sees connections between people and global events. He can't speak, so his father's task is to figure out the boy's numerical clue to save other people's lives. I believe all of us can see patterns if we pay attention, and we can save lives, too.

Over the weekend, Ray and I hosted two happy transgender people, one of whom is a very self-confident, transsexual woman, and the other is an exceedingly grateful, cross-dressing, husband and father. While sitting with them in the living room one morning, two stories jumped out at me from the newspapers we were reading. The first was about a 49-year-old, charismatic and inspiring, gay, male therapist in New York City who committed suicide after completing his prophetic manuscript, *The Right Side of Forty: The Complete Guide to Happiness for Gay Men at Midlife and Beyond*. The second article focused on the objections of animal rights activists to farmers injecting dye into incubating eggs, which is often done so that children at Easter can have their choice of colored chicks, including ones in dayglo green.

So, what are the connections between our transgender guests, the suicide of the gay man, and the dyed chickens? I see the common denominators of "false feathers," and the toxicity of social whims. But what other patterns can be found, and could a life have been saved?

Chickens see color better than humans do, but like human babies, they don't know what color they're supposed to be. Unlike chicks, human embryos are not yet dyed with color, though it has been proposed that proper hormonal interference with fetal development could eliminate variances in sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. If not dyed in the shell, chicks are sprayed with food coloring after they hatch. The same happens to infants. Once other humans designate the infant's gender, babies are sprayed blue or pink. Those colors have intended meaning, but often they are false feathers.

The dayglo green, purple, pink, lime, red, and blue coloring of the chicks eventually change when their feathers grow out. Though we say chickens have "bird brains," we don't know how the dye process impacts their instincts, but we do know that most children get bored with the chicks soon after the bright colors of their feathers change.

My friend, Denise, a corporate play-maker, was spray painted blue when she was born, as was my author friend, Vanessa. Bob, the gay, male prophet who committed suicide, was dyed blue too.

Denise knew at an early age that she wasn't supposed to have been painted blue. She was a tall, gawky, geeky boy who felt poisoned by the blue dye. One day, after a lot of thought and outside counseling, she took the spray bottle and made herself pink. But pink for Denise doesn't mean the same thing it does to some pink chicks. Denise wears jeans instead of a skirt. She raises horses with

her adult daughter, and she doesn't paint her face. Denise is among the most relaxed pink people I know.

Vanessa never felt completely comfortable in the blue she was painted at birth. As a male, he married a pink chick, and had chicks of his own, but since childhood, he wanted to be allowed to express his pink side too. He wore his mother's make-up and clothes when she was out of the house. But blue chicks aren't supposed to pretend to be pink. Vanessa now wears pink a lot, so much so that her actual color is purple. She's worked that out with her wife and her adult children, and she's very happy, though making a living is a big challenge for her.

Bob didn't see that his blue male coloring was wrong, but he couldn't live up to the expectations of a blue chick. Blue chicks aren't supposed to want to mate with other blue chicks. He didn't want to change his color to pink; he just wanted to build a life for himself that was outside the expectations of the people who sprayed the dye. He was a blue chick who was happiest when he was with other blue chicks that also mated with chicks of his color. That worked for a while, and then it didn't. With age, his feathers changed to a less vibrant blue color, and as hard as he tried to experience it otherwise, he felt unwanted by the children.

Could we have seen the "numerical code," figured out the connections, and stopped Bob from suffocating himself with a plastic bag? Heterosexual allies have written to me after reading the story to ask me that question: "What could have been done?"

Sometimes, even when you find chicks just like yourself, you discover that they have created expectations of what your color means, too. In many places, gay blue chicks need to be young and handsome, or rich and famous. This is especially true in "coops" like New York and Los Angeles. Bob was a good therapist who tried to convince himself, as he did other gay, blue chicks that these expectations were as dangerous and unhealthy as dyeing a human baby blue or pink, and then telling them what those colors must mean.

I wish I knew Bob, saw the code in time, and followed it to Bob's door. I would have brought him home with me to stay for a while with two old, gay, blue chicks who have found happiness at midlife and beyond. I might have suggested that for him to be happy with the change in the color of his feathers, it could require that he move to a place where children are less easily bored, and adults know that sprayed dye doesn't define you.

But Bob's suicide isn't the end of the search for the clues we've been given. We've got to get the word out to as many people as we can that they shouldn't dye chickens or children. Pink and blue are only colors. They are not determinants of our life. When we spray paint a child, we clog their pores and make it difficult for them to breathe. We don't want them to be "bird brains."

We also must follow the clues and give clear messages to the chicks that prance around the room in their fancy colors. In order to fly, the colored feathers need to fall out, and in order to soar, the new feathers will only get strong enough with age.