

Black girls learn duality early.

too early.

ALLOW ME TO REINTRODUCE MYSELF⁴

I was a meek girl.
out of place
in my neighborhood.
 too soft
for the sharp edges
that outlined my world,

and New York City will eat you whole.

But.
I grew
and learned
from the women
who,
 brown-faced, like mine
were
 going and coming
 leading and following
were
 healed and processing
 wounded and unlearning

how to be girls
and women
at the same time.

In a world hellbent on shoving them
 you
 us,
into a box.

as if.

⁴ This is a spoken word piece. It is meant to be read out loud. See how it feels on your tongue. Swallow it and repeat.

THE BOXES WE SEE

pre-date us
 boy,
 girl
binary thinking
for a binary world

ill-fitting boxes
 this,
 or that
manufactured boxes
designed
 to “protect”
 to control
 to shield

binary boxes
for a binary world

when we are young
these are the boxes that we see
and swallow

*because children are to be seen
and not heard*

so
we fold
and bend
shift and break
to fit into them,

boxes wrapped in religion
 in patriarchy
 in capitalism
 in hate

boxes that help us survive
a jagged-edged world

BOYS VS. GIRLS⁵

before I could walk
I knew there was a difference
between boys and girls.

5 This is a 5-7-5 haiku.

SINGLE-PARENT (NOUN)

/ˈsɪŋ-gəl/ /ˈper-ənt/

:someone raising a child/ren without a partner

My mother was a “single-parent,” by choice. Felt and lived by the ancient ancestral saying that she’d rather be *alone than unhappy*.⁶ I always saw it as a strength. But that’s not the way the world saw it.

Outside. The term single-parent wandered into my life in elementary school. An utterance by some school adult. A cluster of words that seemed odd to my young ears. Because, yes, my mother was a single parent, but the way the adult flung the words my way made it understood that *being* a single-parent should be avoided. At. All. Cost.

Like somehow my mother (void of a man/father/husband) was less than. Less than a woman? Something to be pitied?

But that’s the thing about being inside and outside The Culture.

Inside. My mother, like many other Black mothers, sought community. My father’s side of the family lived in Brooklyn. We saw Grandma Shirley, Auntie Hope, and Uncle Jermaine often, but Ma raised us uptown, in the Bronx, with her mother (Meemaw) and her side of the family. A blended family with deep roots in the South, made up of play cousins and blood strangers.

6 “It’s Not Right, But It’s Okay,” written by LaShawn Daniels, Rodney Jerkins, Fred Jerkins III, Isaac Phillips, Toni Estes; recorded by the one and only Whitney Houston