

## Gender

Contributed by [Zoe Kaplan](#)

Source: Rabbi Elliot Kulah

This piece was written by Rabbi Elliot Kukla, the first out transgender rabbi. He was ordained in 2006 at HUC-JIR's Los Angeles campus, and now works as a chaplain at the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center.

A few years ago at Kol Nidre I delivered a sermon on the power of diversity to my congregation in Toronto. Afterwards, in the swirling crowd I felt someone tug at my jacket. I turned around to find a nine-year-old boy in lavender shiny "Powerpuffs" sneakers. "I really liked your sermon," he whispered before disappearing into the crowd. During Sukkot his moms told me that he had been hassled about his shoes at school all week, but after hearing my sermon he had decided to keep wearing them. I don't really think it was my words that impacted him, but the visual power of having a transgender, flamingly queer, gender ambiguous rabbi on the bimah.

I couldn't help compare the range of options that the boy in my congregation had to be a full person, with the limited scope of choices that had been available to Ronnie Paris Jr., a boy in Florida who was beaten to death by his father for being a "sissy." I also couldn't stop dreaming of a world where everyone has the option to grow up with the ability to choose their clothes, hobbies, and behaviors without the threat of violence or humiliation. A world where every size, shape, ability, age, and gender is celebrated as yet another manifestation of holiness.

What if from the moment a child was born, instead of asking "is it a boy or a girl," we said, "It's a baby image of God"? What if we all supported each other in being our shiniest, sexiest, fiercest, most authentically quirky selves? This is the future I imagine for all of us and I can tell you right now, it looks fabulous.