

EMMA TEITEL ON PASSPORTS

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Air travel is stressful.

There are passports to mind, forgotten toiletries to stuff last minute into tiny plastic bags, and planes to catch—or miss.

There are glitches in the in-flight entertainment system, crying babies, and — courtesy of the person sitting next to you — inaudible, pungent farts.

But for most of us — and by most of us I mean people whose gender identities match their sex at birth — the stress of air travel is fairly minor.

Unless you have a debilitating fear of heights, or you're a Muslim person wary of racial profiling, the prospect of going to the airport and getting on a plane is unlikely to keep you up at night.

But if you are transgender or gender queer, it might.

In fact, in some cases, it may even prevent you from travelling altogether.

The reason for this is simple. Right now, the gender designations on our nation's passports allow Canadians to identify in only one of two ways — as either “male” or “female.”

There is currently no gender-neutral identification option on Canadian passports, meaning that when a transgender or gender non-conforming person goes to the airport with a single-gender passport they can and do face uncomfortable questions and sometimes discrimination from airport staff who

are confused by or suspicious of the way they look.

RJ Vandrish, an artist who lives in Toronto, who is gender queer, hasn't left the country since 2011 precisely for this reason. (2011 was when Vandrish transitioned; they use gender-neutral pronouns).

“I don't feel comfortable trying to cross any borders,” says Vandrish, “because I don't know how I'm going to read (to airport staff), especially on an international level where gender is perceived differently.”

of Policy at the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the passport problem is top of mind for several transgender and gender non-conforming Canadians whom the organization consulted.

“When a person changes their gender they have to go through a challenging process of changing every single one of their IDs, which is time consuming and costly,” says Daye. “While they are in the middle of it, they might be carrying ID's with different genders.”

In other words, if your

tify as male or female—instead, their passports will be marked with an “X”.

Unfortunately there is a downside that makes the option unpopular with some.

That downside is the possibility that those who choose the X option will be easily “outed” as transgender or gender queer by airport officials.

Some gender non-conforming people, says Daye, would rather take their chances with a conventional passport than run the risk of outing themselves to the world.

They prefer the conventional passport (imperfect as it is) to the one that would single them out.

But in the absence of a better solution (perhaps in the future, we can remove gender altogether from passports) the X option is the safest and the most fair that we've got. For those concerned about security, passports are full of other ways to confirm identity—from height to a photograph.

“Gender is rarely needed to deliver a service to a person,” says Daye. Neither is religion — once common on identification cards and travel documents.

“We used to use race and religion to identify people and we don't anymore,” says Daye. It's our hope that gender will come under the same scrutiny.”

It's my hope too. Because when transgender and gender non-conforming people go to the airport, the anxiety inducing question on their minds shouldn't be “what will they say when I flash my passport,” but “where the hell did I put it?”

Emma Teitel is a national columnist for the Toronto Star.



By requiring holders to indicate a gender, passports reveal information that might not be needed. HANDOUT

“Even domestic travel is a little terrifying because I don't know if they're going to let me on the flight or not, because Transport Canada states that I have to look like my sex.”

Vandrish's anxiety about this isn't unwarranted.

“I get referred to as ‘oh sir-um oh, ma'am’ and the person is very confused,” they say. “Or I get looks when I use the washroom. Those experiences tell me that I'm not going to have an easy time traveling with a male or female passport.”

Vandrish isn't alone either; according to Marcella Daye, Acting Manager

driver's licence says you're male and your passport says you're female, accessing services that require two pieces of government issued ID can be make for awkward and potentially discriminatory results.

Luckily there is an easy solution to this problem—one adopted by seven other nations, including Australia, Bangladesh, Germany and New Zealand; a solution approved by the International Civil Aviation Organization (to which Canada adheres).

It's called the third gender option: citizens who select it don't have to iden-

Dallas r raises r

URBAN COMPAS

Petti Fong

The last we heard a deadly shootings in was gunman Mical was cornered and l caded himself on t floor of a downtow garage.

Negotiations we hours before break Police eventually outfit a robot with sive, send it in to t man and detonate

There is more, c that will come out days ahead. We al have glimpses of r that sparked the T night shooting, w white officers wer and the frustratio fears that led to t getting killed by a controlled by poli evening began pe with a protest tha have been brimm anger from the p two separate fata ings earlier in the black men by wh officers.

The shooting o is the first public ledged police shc North America vi

It's a techniqu deployed then pe the U.S. military in situations whe vironment is uns unpredictable.

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