



4-7-2014

Two Is Not Always Better Than One

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Abstract

Since moving to Berlin in January for my semester abroad, I have witnessed many fantastic scenes while riding the U-Bahn. Ranging from a suit-clad man hurdle-jumping into the train to women in hijabs gossiping about another passenger in a burqa, my glimpses of Berlin never cease to amaze me, but last week, as I watched a family say goodbye, the children tearfully waving long after the train left, I shot back to my own tearful goodbyes. The exchange I saw was so loving, the exact opposite of all those years I transferred from one parent to the other: every Monday, every other Thursday, every holiday, and every birthday. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, family, divorce

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

TWO IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER THAN ONE

April 7, 2014

Since moving to Berlin in January for my semester abroad, I have witnessed many fantastic scenes while riding the U-Bahn. Ranging from a suit-clad man hurdle-jumping into the train to women in hijabs gossiping about another passenger in a burqa, my glimpses of Berlin never cease to amaze me, but last week, as I watched a family say goodbye, the children tearfully waving long after the train left, I shot back to my own tearful goodbyes. The exchange I saw was so loving, the exact opposite of all those years I transferred from one parent to the other: every Monday, every other Thursday, every holiday, and every birthday.



I will never forget the day my parents told me they had filed for divorce.

The subject of numerous think pieces, self-help columns, and even the theme of a [Huffington Post topic page](#), divorce has become an accepted part of western-ized/-izing societies with celebrity divorces receiving large amounts of attention. Recent coverage includes: [“Johnny Weir and Husband Settle Bitter Dog Custody War”](#) (TMZ) and the [“Concious Uncoupling”](#) of Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin (WOW). It saddens—and often sickens—me that the divorces of celebrities are splashed across headlines and sensationalized for the public as if to say, “Look! Celebrities are just like us, their marriages end (horribly) too.” Most articles revel in the drama of settlements and custody battles, but it is rare that they consider the feelings of the individuals divorcing, much less those of their children.

Luckily, we have Buzzfeed to step in and fill in that hole, and by that I mean release one of their chock-full-o-stereotypes lists titled: [“20 Signs You’re a Child of Divorce.”](#) I read this list minutes before an emotional phone call with my younger brother about how much we hate switching houses per the joint custody agreement. I cried on a friend’s shoulder after we hung up. I cried because of the pain in my brother’s voice. I cried because I recognized it is the same pain I try to keep out of mine. I cried because no one seems to understand.

Many of the Buzzfeed bullet points refer to the positives of having two of many different things. Double Christmas. Double Birthdays. Being tired of one parent’s house means being able to go to the other’s house for a break. Having “bitchin’ organizational skills because you have to plan what to keep at each house.” I will forever consider going to college one of the best moments of my life because it meant that for the first time since I was nine, I did

not have to worry about twos. I had ONE room, ONE bed, ONE toothbrush. If I forgot something, I could walk back to my room and get it instead of living without it because I was too terrified to ask Parent 1 to drive me to Parent 2's house to retrieve what I forgot.

Double Christmas. Not that great when it means getting up early at Parent 1's house to put on a happy face because at 10am you have to transfer to Parent 2's car in order to spend the holiday with them. Try doing that every year for holidays including, but not limited to: Christmas, Easter, the 4th of July, St. Patrick's Day, Halloween, and Flag Day. That's right: Double Flag Day.

Imagine waking up on your birthday knowing that you'll be having lunch with Parent 1 followed by dinner with Parent 2, during which there will be numerous comments made about how they wish THEY could have the whole day with you. Never mind how you would prefer to spend the day.

Perhaps the worst part of BuzzFeed's list are numbers 17 and 18: the opportunity to talk bad about Parent 1 to Parent 2 and vice versa. Obviously, this is OK in some situations, but not in the majority of cases. For example: the valid complaint of a child can easily be misconstrued by Parent 1 as vindication of their hurt feelings; they then stop listening to the child in order to explain why Parent 2 is a bad person and how much they hate sharing you with Parent 2 because they clearly love you more. This often leads to the child reprising their role in "Kill the Carrier," a weekly TV show during which the Child accidentally delivers ammunition to a Parent, and loses their agency as they become forced to carry messages from Parent to Parent, observes the fallout, and tries to go on with their life until they, a week later, relay the response.

In place of the BuzzFeed list, I recommend one from the Huffington Post, compiled using [Whisper](#). Titled "[14 Hidden Truths About Being a Child of Divorce](#)" it provides, through our voices, a much more accurate look at the effects of divorce on children. I cried while reading this list, because for once I felt that someone understood me. I cried because I discovered an agency I never knew existed. Other lonely children of divorce should read this list; hopefully it will provide a much-needed sense of solidarity. Journalists writing about celebrity divorce should read this list; hopefully it will remind them that behind the brave faces put on for cameras are people who hurt. Individuals who eagerly scan juicy headlines or read BuzzFeed lists should read this; hopefully it will remind them of the same.

Had my parents stayed together, we would celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary this May. Instead, in September, I will remember the anniversary of their divorce, an event that took the proverbial wrecking ball to our life and 13 years later provides the platform from which I may build mine.

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/two-is-not-always-better-than-one/>