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The Scars of Stigma

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The Scars of Stigma

Abstract

“I do”: two words that conclude the plot lines to hundreds of romantic movies. Two words that Hollywood has imprinted in our minds as the culmination of true love – words that children across the world dream about. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, stigma, Federal Marriage Amendment, LGBTQ, societal prejudice

Disciplines

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Social Psychology and Interaction

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu) 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

THE SCARS OF STIGMA

October 5, 2015

“I do”: two words that conclude the plot lines to hundreds of romantic movies. Two words that Hollywood has imprinted in our minds as the culmination of true love – words that children across the world dream about.



On January 7, I heard my mothers say those words after fourteen and a half years of being together. That was a happy moment, one I'll never forget. But it also carried burdens along with it – burdens most families never have to deal with, and no family ever should.

Growing up with two mothers was like, well, growing up. We had ups and downs, jokes and fights, laughs and sobs – everything every healthy family experiences. My family never would have been different from any other if so many people hadn't insisted on making it so.

I had a happy, healthy childhood. My parents instilled in me a passion for academics that pushed me to excel in school. They taught me to get involved in sports and clubs, and to never quit anything once I started. My parents gifted me with the skills to make wonderful friends who genuinely enjoyed being around my family. But most of all, they provided me with support. I've always known that no matter what, they'd be there for me.

I never hid my mothers. Instead, I proudly flaunted my home life to the world. One of the first things I've always told people about myself is my parents. I wouldn't change a thing about my family, past or present. But we didn't live in a vacuum, and a world of judgment existed around the periphery of our lives.

Imagine nine-year-old me, hearing my mother yell at the television in the living room. Imagine me walking in, innocently asking, “What's wrong?” Imagine my mother explaining to her young son that people wanted to make it illegal for her to have the same rights to love as everyone else – that people out there think families like ours shouldn't exist – that people out there hate others, including her, for being themselves. That day I was exposed to a world no child should ever have to see, and it became regularly forced upon me.

The movement my mother was screaming at – ratifying the Federal Marriage Amendment into the Constitution – thankfully failed. But that didn't change the fact that millions of people saw my parents as abominations. That didn't change the fact that every day someone somewhere called my family an atrocity, unnatural, or blasphemous.

That was the storm that surrounded us: a whirlwind of hatred. Everywhere I turned I saw someone spewing bigotry, their words etching cut after cut into my family's psyche, leaving scabs that would never fully heal.

My mothers tried to shield me from it all, and when they couldn't, they tried to teach me to love those who hated them. But I never could.

My mothers, religious themselves, tried to teach me faith. They told me that God loved everyone, and that it wasn't His message people chanted at their rallies against gay marriage. But my mind, bombarded with hatred from the social right, associated God with discrimination and Christianity with pain. No matter how much I craved religious solace, I couldn't get past the pain of their words. I still can't.

My parents tried to teach me peace, but my anger at their assailants often boiled underneath. In fits of adolescent anger pillows became the victims of my frustration. In ninth grade I even found a human outlet – a boy who joked about my mothers. I remember the anger, the red tinge around my vision, the thumping in my ears. I hit him. I, the quiet scholar, punched another student – the only time I ever got in trouble in school. I knew better, my parents taught me better, but he still roused me to violence. I vowed to never use my fists again.

That anger, the drive to defend the mothers I love, exhausted me. Sometimes I yelled. I yelled at trees, the moon, anything that would listen. But I was never loud enough to drown out the shouts of hatred. Occasionally I cried, my tears as hot as my anger.

Since the fight I've learned to channel the pain, use it for inspiration. I've found some patience – grasped how to respond to questions like, "So, which is the dad?" without getting into arguments.

But I haven't found peace with my mothers' attackers. When someone compares the love my parents feel towards each other to bestiality or perversion I still feel the fury bubble up inside of me. I still constantly remain on the defensive, ready for an attack to be hurled at my family. One careless comment can still engulf my conscience for the remainder of the day. I thought I'd escape this when I ventured off to college, but I was wrong.

Society has moved forward during my lifetime – marriage equality is now nationally recognized. The legal steps are staggering, but they do not quell the hatred, do not heal the wounds continuously inflicted. Thousands of LGBTQA individuals die from the cuts society gouges into them, whether through the hate instilled in their murderers or the self-hatred force-fed into them. Their family and friends, directly and indirectly, get slashed by the same blades of bigotry. That is the world we inhabit – the reality I was raised in.

Societal prejudice may have prematurely crippled my childhood, fractured my faith, and pierced my peace, but it cannot break the bonds of my family. Hatred cannot destroy our love for one another or puncture the pride that I feel for my parents.

I will not roll over and play the victim. I will not take the insults flung at my family. I will not sit by and let the likes of Mike Huckabee or Kim Davis dictate our world. Instead I will use my voice to fight so that future families will not have to endure the abuse that mine, and many others, have forcibly felt.

The scars they gave me are my motivation for a better tomorrow.

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