

THE SPIRAL

OF INJUSTICE

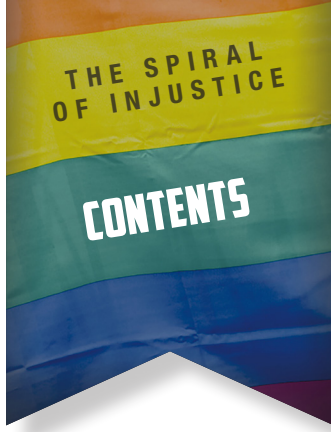
**THE LGBTQ
LIVED EXPERIENCE**



Wassmuth

**CENTER FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Home of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial



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SPIRAL OF INJUSTICE

"the other"

LANGUAGE

Language

targeting "the other" through language, word choice, connotation, and imagery (name calling, ridicule, telling jokes, belittling, accepting and promoting stereotyping, etc.)

Avoidance

excluding "the other" through conscious or unconscious treatment that denies participation, limits and/or restricts access (social avoidance, scapegoating, portrayal and non-portrayal of marginalized communities)

Discrimination

denying and disadvantaging "the other" through direct and non-direct acts based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference (employment and/or educational opportunities, workplace and housing)

AVOIDANCE

DISCRIMINATION

VIOLENCE

ELIMINATION

Violence

intimidating or harming "the other" through physical acts (threats, assault, desecration, stalking, harassment, arson, murder, terrorism)

Elimination

eradicating "the other" through deliberate and/or systemic destruction of life and /or liberty (CULTURAL: customs and traditions, language, music, art, history, science, political participation; BEHAVIORAL: segregation, isolation, relocation, resettlement, removal; PHYSICAL: murder, genocide)

"The Other"

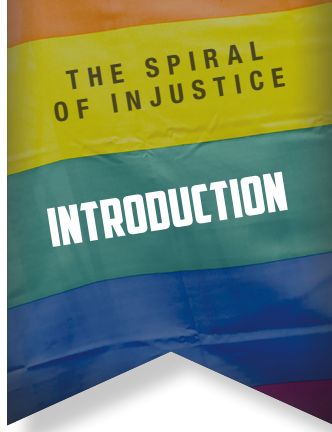
an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way, often targeted because of association with a group based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference

Inscribed in the stone of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial, Mahatma Gandhi reminds us to “Make injustice visible.” Models used to illustrate a pattern or progression of injustice – making it visible - assist in educating for and about social justice.

The **Spiral of Injustice** is a model created by the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights to illustrate the devolution of humanity whether discussing the Holocaust, other genocides, or contemporary acts of injustice. The model suggests that the “stages” of injustice (language, avoidance, discrimination, violence, and elimination) are in motion and employed as weapons targeting “the other.”

“The other” is defined as an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way; often targeted because of association with a group based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, nationality, or religious preference.

MADE POSSIBLE WITH FUNDING FROM
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INTOLERANCE IS NOT CONFINED

Blake Hunter

THE LAND THAT CAME TO be called Idaho was once inhabited by multiple tribal nations since time immemorial, and the land that came to be called North America was the most culturally and linguistically diverse place the world had ever seen. Yet, in the way we teach our children about the history of this state, the story begins with the white man and his triumphs.

It's imperative that we begin any conversation about Idaho's history with indigeneity and the fact that it was colonized. The violence of colonization continues to this day -- against the land and against indigenous peoples. Colonization explains how we got here - literally, for white people like

me - and how our society is structured. You might be wondering why this is important in an e-book about LGBTQIA+ Idahoans. The reason is that colonization explains our relationships to gender and queerness, too.

Of the many identities sometimes included in the “+” part of “LGBTQIA+” is the number 2. This represents Two-Spirit people. As Harlan Pruden (Nehiyawe/First Nations Cree) and Se-ah-dom Edmo (Shoshone-Bannock, Nez Perce, Yakama) write in “Two-Spirit People: Sex, Gender & Sexuality in Historic and Contemporary Native America” published by the NCAI Policy Research Center, “The term/identity of Two-Spirit does not make sense unless it is contextualized within a Native American frame.” This is because one of the methods used to colonize was a strict, patriarchal gender binary enforced along the socially constructed binary of physical sex. Hundreds of tribal nations throughout North America differ in their terms for Two-Spirit people and have honored anywhere from three to a dozen genders. These records indicate that the gender binary is a fundamentally Anglo-Christian construct, and that people beyond the binary have always existed and will always exist.

With that understanding, we can better frame the experience of LGBTQIA+ Idahoans. Idaho has long served as a haven for anti-government and white supremacist groups, such as the Aryan Nations in northern Idaho. Their larger goals of manufacturing white supremacy rely on patriarchal gender roles as well, limiting gender variant expression and non-heterosexual relationships. The politically conservative approaches to trans and queer issues in Idaho today have roots in this ideology.

Intolerance is not confined to small rural towns or counties, however. Though Idaho’s capital, Boise, is the state’s most common site for

pro-LGBTQIA+ demonstrations, few people know the history behind one of Boise's most notable features: a sixty-foot cross atop Table Rock that overlooks the city as a symbol of Christian moral purity. It was erected in 1956, a year after a gay sex scandal rocked the city and sent 16 men to prison as the Red Scare maligned the national LGBTQIA+ community as weak and susceptible to communist influences.

Religious communities have been driving forces behind many of the state's anti-LGBTQIA+ legal actions. Opposing the repeal of anti-sodomy laws frequently used against gay men in the 1970s, supporting the 1994 failed Proposition 1 that advocated against gay people receiving minority rights and largely thwarting the "Add the Words" campaign of the 21st century, some of Idaho's churches have played a harmful role on Idaho's largest anti-LGBTQIA+ stages.

Since the federal legalization of gay marriage in 2015, numerous well-wishing allies to the LGBTQIA+ community assume that anti-queer/trans oppression no longer exists. However, this notion could not be further from the truth; our most marginalized community members are still being targeted, through legal and extrajudicial violence alike.

While acceptance of bi, gay, and lesbian Idahoans has markedly grown in recent decades, thanks largely to greater media exposure and the popularity of Pride events, Idaho has rapidly emerged as a prominent site of legal oppression against transgender citizens. During the 2020 state legislative session, multiple bills were proposed with the intention of limiting transgender participation in society. The methods of these pieces of legislation varied from preventing trans girls and women from playing

women's sports to denying the right to change one's gender marker on birth certificates. Their purpose was clear.

These pieces of anti-trans legislation were the instigating events that led to the creation of this e-book. With the recognition of historical and ongoing oppression against trans and queer citizens by our state and local governments, media, mass culture, and educational systems, we need tools to build community wherein LGBTQIA+ lives are respected. One crucial method to achieving this is through storytelling.

Offering first-person narratives has been known to improve empathy, understanding, and affection in people who have dissimilar lived experiences. Given Idaho's history of exclusion, sharing the stories and experiences of LGBTQIA+ people helps us to not only treat others with greater compassion, but also to build community and hold space for one another's life experiences - full of pain, triumph, grief, and love as they are.

To this end, we have commissioned the writing of five different authors to tell a chapter of the story that has, and is, threatening human rights. Each story explains one of the five stages in the Spiral of Injustice: language, avoidance, discrimination, violence, and elimination. The Wassmuth Center for Human Rights developed the Spiral of Injustice as a framework for understanding how groups can become increasingly oppressed by entire societies.

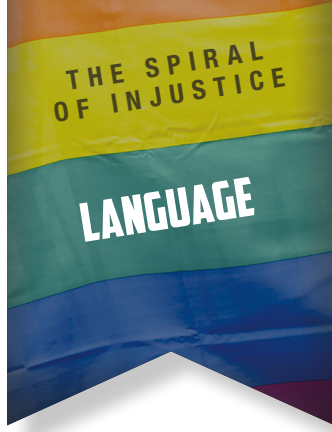
At the margins of society where people hold multiple oppressed identities, it's easier for those in power to allow injustices to go unnoticed or to dismiss them. This is why we intentionally selected a group of queer and trans authors who hold other intersecting identities as well, including race,

age, ability, and religion. Oppression is a learned process that devolves and becomes increasingly violent step-by-step, and our nation, as well as our state, are both plagued with examples of it unfolding on our current sociopolitical landscapes. The purpose of understanding this process is to understand how to interrupt the Spiral, first within oneself and ultimately within one's community.

We hope these stories of hardship, resilience, and healing inspire you to better comprehend the realities of the LGBTQIA+ lived experience, see the shared humanity in all of us, and ultimately initiate dialogue and attitudinal shifts that will unravel this Spiral and bring about a more equitable, just, and inclusive state for all.



Blake Hunter is currently a journalism, human rights, and history undergraduate student at Boise State University, where they are an editor at The Arbiter, the university's student-run news outlet.



'FAGGOT' IS A BADGE OF HONOR

Joel Weisel

Language: targeting “the other” through word choice, connotation, and imagery (name calling, ridiculing, telling jokes, belittling, accepting, and promoting stereotypes, etc.)

THE WORDS “GAYS ARE CULTURALLY appropriating the rainbow from God” were plastered across my Facebook page. It was from a pastor in Florida named Bryan Fischer. To most of my friends, he was another random extremist, toting ideologies that hold no presence in their lives. I, however, was subjected to his teaching weekly from 1996-2006.

I was born into an evangelical Christian church called Community Church of the Valley. It was nestled in a strip mall on the outskirts of

Garden City. Bryan's church had unspoken rules and regulations that most of the congregation followed without question. Hating the gays wasn't a radical view; it was an inherent fact of life. Keeping all the kids in a Christian bubble was paramount to keeping them pure. Keep any opposing views away, keep the sinners away, and pray for the world to come back to God. Everyone in the church kept up appearances. Most of the children were homeschooled and taught that Pokémon was demonic, Harry Potter was witchcraft, and Teletubbies were recruiting children to the gay agenda. The screw-up families were the church's projects to fix and bring to God. We all felt we were doing God's work.

We were the upstanding family. The missionary family. Our family held status. However, my family was as rebellious as the church allowed. My mother spoke her piece, openly confronting the pastor on his preaching. Our family was the only family that was openly allowed to drink wine. My dad was the only Southwest Asian man with whom the White Christians were okay. My mother exercised her rebellion in educating us. We engaged with the history of genocide, war, and resettlement. She taught us compassion for the world beyond the church's confines. Still, I learned that rebellion had its limits. Queerness was not a point of conversation.

Coming to terms with myself meant I had to deconstruct the language. Faggot was the cornerstone of who I was. It rang from Bryan Fischer's doctrine, locker rooms, teachers, everywhere. When I went to public school, I also had lessons on how not to be gay - push through the halls, get rid of the clarinet case, drop friends who are girls, stand tall. I was taught that faggotry and femininity were things to abandon. I tried.

I learned how to perform, manufacturing what I should be. I should be strong, so I played three sports a year. I should be holy, so I trained to be a pastor. I shoved down the parts of me that I needed. There was no conversation; there was only the way things are supposed to be, what's natural, what religion says is wrong. There were no words left for me except "faggot."

I was taught the word "faggot" from its reverberations off lockers and linoleum flooring. It meant I had the voice, the walk, the hands. I was too feminine to be in my brown body. Today, the meaning has shifted. "Faggot" is a badge of honor. I have survived, lived, and am fighting to thrive. My journey here has been messy. It involves details that I am not ready to talk about with everyone. That is okay. Coming out is complex, difficult, tense, and it doesn't always improve. I learned that I am what makes the journey worthwhile. There is nothing that has been thrown at me that I have not overcome.

Queerness was not a conversation in my home. The language was warped and twisted by the dogma of a pastor long lost. Today my mother and I can have conversations in that language and transform it. We have, many times. I sat with my mother for hours dissecting subjects that ranged from Sodom and Gomorrah, why I became who I did, to who I loved. My mother has found the words to see me for who I am. I have time and time again challenged her to step up and talk to family, friends, and strangers to defend my identity; she has yet to back down from the challenge. My mother chose to love me fully. No "hate the sin love the sinner" dogma. It's love the child, fully. Fight for the child, fully.

The harm is still there. The years of self-hatred, the words I still struggle to shake, still exist. I do not own the privilege of silence. "It gets better"

are words without deeds. Getting better is hard. It is uncomfortable. It is a promise without action. I wear what I have been called like a badge of honor. I am a faggot, a queer, and so many other things. I own the words.

The language I was taught continues to have power. When I see Bryan Fischer's name on a Facebook post, I cannot help but question. Did I come out bold enough? Is this a choice? Could I have prayed harder? No! I have to remind myself that what I was told was a lie. I am turning twenty-four this week and I am finally figuring out the depth of what words have done. Last night I was sitting on the porch talking to a friend about where we are in life. Then it all poured out of me. I told them how the only way I can express this pain is when I am drunk. The closet isolated me. I learned that faking it made me worth people's time. I was a commodity. I learned what I needed to say to pass, to get teachers off my back, to get friends to stop worrying. At some point, the lie became the truth. I remember sitting at lunch my senior year alone; people only liked me when I was useful - when my queer, my loud, my trauma worked for them. I have no contact with those from that period. I was the diva mother that gave good advice but was easily left to sort things out on my own. I may wear "faggot" like a badge of honor, but I still do not know if I truly believe I deserve the humanity my upbringing denied me.

Healing takes time. Takes hard truths. Takes dissecting friendships, memories, words for what they are. This is excruciatingly frustrating. I am proud of being a "faggot" but there is more power there than I allow. The image of "faggot" in my head for years has been this caricature of the queer man. I am creating a new image. There is power here I don't have access to yet. There are parts of this story I am still coming to terms with

seven years out. Coming out and confronting the language I came to know and teach as truth was only the first of many steps. I am still learning what healing is, what I truly believe about the world. We make it better. Better takes action. It's not a magic trick. I carried the burden of shifting my world. I had to change how we functioned so that future generations could be more fluid than I.

I fully planned on never coming out to my family and friends. I was going to move away and broaden my closet's reach. The decision to come out is for another story, but the effect of me coming out has rippled through my life.

It is important for the next generation to know what the last generation has overcome. The context I was forced into is just as important as what I have done with it. I have graduated from Boise State University with honors. I have a life left to live that I thought was more than I deserve. I feel the need to prove myself, still. I have overcome the worst of the worst, although there are things I will never be able to fully move past. I am understanding that some words will always stay the same. No amount of positivity can shift them. Certain words haunt me. That is okay. I am a "faggot." I burn and survive. I burn and bring life. I burn and am light. I have not fully seen the depth of who I am yet, but I am ready.



Joel Weisel is a queer trans Armenian based in Idaho. They are a writer, advocate, healer, and researcher. Joel is a recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in Theater Arts and Narrative Studies as a form of empowerment

for Frontline communities. Joel is currently working with an organization called Yereazad to aid in the advancement of Armenians in the homeland and Diaspora. They believe in a free Artsakh.

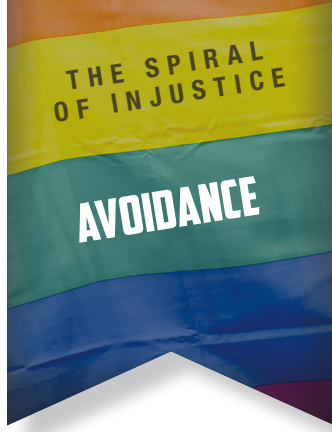


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AVOIDANCE CREATES A CYCLE

Brandon Connolly

Avoidance: excluding “the other” through conscious or unconscious treatment that denies participation, limits and/or restricts access (social avoidance, scapegoating, portrayal and non-portrayal of marginalized communities)

THE WORD LONELY FEELS THE same way in your mouth as it does in action. Your tongue pushes the word out to the inside of your teeth, forcing the word into a hard place. Your lips thin to reveal teeth, not quite a smile, to mock the pain in the word and hide where your tongue has pushed it to. I’ve repeated it so many times, each a representative of the person who chose to leave, that I detest the word. I don’t want to say it

anymore. It slept in the shadows of my memories as I think back on what followed my coming out as a transgender man.

Most days I like to remember growing up surrounded in happiness, love, and friendship. My siblings and I were raised in togetherness, the kind that motivated my mom and abuelitos (grandparents) to immigrate from Mexico. Sometimes the togetherness was intoxicating and swung in and out of codependency. I felt safe and certain in the fact that my family loved me no matter what. That belief of “no matter what” didn’t stop at the borders of my family. It seeped into my friendships. I can say with confidence that I got along with essentially everyone. I was late to almost every class because I would stand and visit with or wave to passing classmates. I love people! Well, I loved people.

Initially I had told only my girlfriend and a handful of friends that I was transgender but was ultimately outed by younger relatives who didn’t understand the repercussions of outing a trans person. This misstep in my social transition felt like tripping at the top of the hill and consequently rolling down at breakneck speed. The reaction was negative from both friends and family. I wasn’t expecting or prepared for what would come with my transition. Looking back now, I know it was foolishly innocent and ignorant of me. I grew up in religion. I lived in a predominantly religious town a two-hour drive from the Idaho/Utah border. People who felt strongly opposed to my transgender identity chose tactics that are deeply rooted in our church’s handling of those excommunicated. For my childhood loved ones, who participate in religious groups, my trans identity was tied to a sin and I was no longer worthy of their love and support. They will never understand that was when I needed them the

most. I have been permanently changed by those closest to me who chose to go to great lengths to avoid me. From the most subtle to the painfully obvious, these actions tore my sense of self apart, shredding ribbons of me that I used to tie myself together for survival.

There was never a warning when avoidance happened. Some occurred in the moment; others were carefully calculated. Avoiding eye contact and physically removing oneself from paths of interaction seemed like the easiest methods of avoidance. There have been several times I've walked around a grocery store to spot an old classmate, teacher, or church friend. I've lost the habit of waving now. I tried one too many times after my transition to have my gesture ignored and returned with a sharp turn into another aisle. No smile. No wave back. But I heard their voices in an old memory trailing close behind as they walked away.

Accompanying family members in public was painfully awkward when spotting a familiar face, only for their gazes to be locked on each other, refusing to acknowledge my presence. I felt their shame with every passing second while I stood nearby. I rarely shop with loved ones anymore. I'd grown to love a nice elderly couple from my church like my own grandparents. They were the family of an elementary school friend I played with, so this couple knew my family well. I talked and sat with them often during church services and went to their house a few times to visit. After I came out, I attended a church event with my family, to be supportive. I was excited to be wearing a suit and tie like I had always envisioned my "Sunday best" to look. The elderly couple mingled with attendees after the event. The woman looked at me, recognized who I was, and moved herself into a crowd of conversationalists. I haven't seen or talked to them

since. Most people I once knew eventually depleted the energy it took to avoid me. Now they brave walking past me.

Social media has made it clear that I can even be avoided in the warmth and coziness of my bed. In the early stages of my transition, I had Facebook. After sharing a handful of trans-related content, dozens of people unfriended me. Specifically, I shared a video from TEDx of a trans man speaking on the empathy that cisgender people can have for transgender people. Within hours, my mom texted me demanding that I take it down. I refused because of the autonomy I had over my account and what I post on it. I deleted it anyway. Then I deleted my Facebook account. At the time I felt so overwhelmed and exhausted from defending myself alone on social media that I didn't see the reason for it. I was unplugged from all major social media networks for two years. Overlooked, misinterpreted, or coupled with disappointment and shame, the avoidance I experienced in the close quarters of my immediate family was the most detrimental and has been the hardest from which to heal.

I've seen it too often to deny that the culture around my childhood religion is entwined with secrecy and denial. There's a history of shame, punishment, and ostracism that has been inherited from colonial protestants in North America. I wish I could say that my family was immune. When I had no choice but to come out to my parents, they felt it appropriate to grieve the loss of their child to the stranger delivering such terrible news. It's difficult to be present in the face of grieving loved ones over an old identity, especially when your happiness doesn't derail that grief. Of course, denial was first. They reminded me of the female binary I displayed in my youth, unwilling to recognize how infrequent that reality

was. Hurtful things were said during the angry stage. It has had lasting effects on me and my parents that will echo into the coming generations of our family. At one point, my parents wanted to bargain my relationship with my fiancé. “Why can’t you just live together?” “Why do you have to get married?” “Weddings are so expensive.” My parents said this to me with such certainty while simultaneously planning my younger sister’s wedding. Even in the midst of my engagement, my family never asked about my fiancé, and she wasn’t allowed at family gatherings.

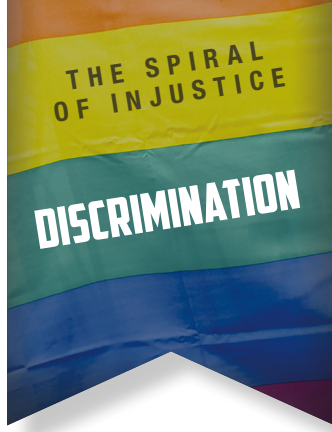
I understand why my family grieved. I was no stranger to that grief. I’ve been grieving my entire life over the loss of my identity and role I played in the misogyny and sexism of my family culture. I waited so patiently for my parents to find acceptance. What my parents managed to accept was that they couldn’t change my mind about my transition or marriage. This kind of acceptance was good enough for them but failed its critical role of acceptance of my gender identity. Their conclusion weaved knots of insecurity and avoidance into our daily interactions. How do you avoid a family member after a lifetime of teaching the importance of family togetherness? Disinterest and dismissal. My family avoided asking deep questions or details about my life. This was extended to censoring the explanation of my transition journey with my younger siblings. I grew up very close to my siblings and suddenly I wasn’t allowed to share a majority of my life with them. They didn’t know anything about me as a young adult. My family couldn’t be bothered to use my pronouns or say my name. In fact, both were usually avoided altogether. My family members would go out of their way to stand by my side to talk to me rather than call my name across the room. I’d be grouped with other family members into sentences to avoid using my pronouns. The microaggressions made

intentions clear. My family avoided getting to know their son in his truest form.

What I know now is that avoidance creates a cycle. Those who no longer wanted to be in my life forced me into isolation. The discomfort it brought made avoiding those situations the easiest self-preserving option. In the end, it worked for those wishing for my exile. I isolated myself and allowed their behavior to change my own. My pain satisfied their belief that sin equals suffering. But they were wrong. My emotional scars are healing because I've given myself the space to heal. I've had time to love myself in my isolation. These events have shown me the worth and value of my time, energy, and love. The work has been difficult, but I'm happy and grateful to be surrounded by those who truly care about me.



Brandon Connolly is a LGBTQ+ community organizer and transgender activist in rural Idaho.



LESSONS FROM EASTER SUNDAY

Justin Pruett

Discrimination: denying and disadvantaging “the other” through direct and non-direct acts based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference (employment and/or educational opportunities, workplace, and housing)

WAS ABOUT 11 YEARS OLD when I glimpsed what I thought was my first instance of discrimination. As most monumental childhood moments go, I recall it clearly.

It was Easter Sunday, 1993, at the little country church in Tennessee where I grew up. I was sitting with my grandparents in the pew where we always sat, “dressed to the nines” as most kids were on that holiday - suspenders,

bow tie, brand-new suit jacket (matching my little brother's, of course), and shiny brown suede shoes. There was not an Easter Sunday that went by without a brand-new outfit to match the importance of the occasion. To be fair, I was a very gregarious eleven-year-old. I was already leading songs during worship service, shaking hands confidently with older congregants, and getting groomed by my grandmother to be a minister someday. So, it was only fitting that my bright outfit matched my very outsized personality. I was a kid who was not ashamed to say or do most anything. If I was asked to give a speech in front of a crowd of people, my hand immediately went up. If the teacher asked me to lead a group of my classmates in a project, I already had the project planned and my classmates' tasks assigned. I was a little adult in a very small body - a smart, obedient, talented, and very eager kid who knew he was different from the other kids but did not have the language nor the life experience to capture what that difference was.

This Easter was a bit unusual. It was the first time I had met an adult who had the same flare, the same outsized personality, and the same audaciousness of spirit as I. Notwithstanding the fact that this person was acutely different, one trait was noticeably evident to me - he was not like the other adults in my life. This man was the first openly gay man I had ever met. And not only was he open about his gayness, but he was also very much a feminine-acting Black man who, unlike most, if not all, of the other men in the church that Easter Sunday, spoke with a lisp, walked with an airy glide, and had his hair permed straight in a ponytail. Remember this was 1993, he was different in a big way, and I, as well as the rest of the church attendees, recognized that difference immediately.

Despite my fantastical memory of meeting this person and the overwhelming impact that meeting had on my life, it is notable for the purpose of this piece to showcase just how much one event of discrimination has in shaping one's life, worldview, and the many decisions to follow. You see, this meeting was critical to me on two fronts - one, because he was the first Black gay man that I had ever met, and two, this was the first person I was explicitly told to discriminate against and to avoid at all costs. That was the moment in my childhood when I had a vague realization of how complex and difficult my place was going to be in this world. It was a sudden realization that nothing I was ever going to attempt was going to be easy. Like that man, my collective identities (Black, male, gay, exuberant, Christian, etc.) were going to be at odds with each other, and discrimination for one or all of them was sure to follow.

While I would love to say that this experience is a unique one, I know that it is not. There are many Black men, dare I say gay men who happen to be Black, who share a very similar story.

Growing up gay in an evangelical Black church in the South gave me a unique preview to the types of discrimination I would be subjected to later in life. More specifically, I understood that my set of identities were going to be a handicap in furthering my education. I understood that being an open Black gay man could prohibit me from achieving success in the workplace. Just as all those good Christian folks that Easter Sunday discriminated against the gay man who walked into church that day, I envisioned my future self in him and knew I was sure to face the same backlash, albeit discrimination, when I grew up.

In so many ways, that Easter Sunday gave me the proverbial “sword and shield” to circumnavigate the discrimination I faced immediately out of college. My first post-graduation job was working as a paralegal at a mid-sized Virginia law firm where the employee racial makeup was approximately 99% White. I was the only Black employee, but I was not the only new employee. There were other young, new college graduated paralegals with the same educational experience I had. After working there for a couple of months, I quickly learned that despite our newness, we were treated differently. I learned that my counterparts were able to negotiate their compensation before accepting the same job, whereas I was not given that opportunity and told that the job was a take-it or leave-it offer, and the salary was not negotiable.

In hindsight, I have surmised that this might have been a personal failure on my part in not being more forceful in negotiating the salary of my first adult job. However, after years of reflecting on that novel professional experience, I realize now that there were other forces at play at that time that certainly reflected a view that *my* employment was different from my counterparts. While the evidence is circumstantial at best, a later review of my compensation in comparison to my White counterparts reflected a substantive market difference. Whereas I had a salary in which I could barely afford to pay rent for an apartment, student loans, and a car, my White counterparts did not share that struggle, and it was not because they did not have a house, car, or student loan.

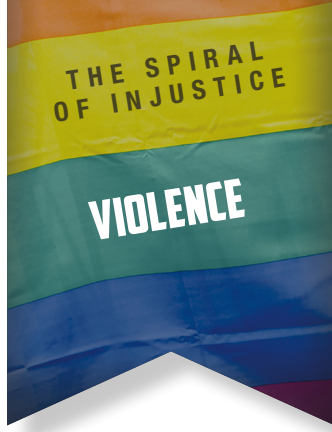
When I applied to law school that same year, I was turned away by some of the nation’s most elite law schools, despite graduating with honors, having impressive college extracurricular experience, premium letters of

recommendation, and workplace experience. Yes, it is possible that there were other factors at play that informed those schools' decisions to deny my acceptance. I cannot really speak to those external factors. What I do know with certainty, however, is that my law school application essay was an honest, open accounting about the intersectionality of my blackness and gayness - an identity that I did not hide both at the firm job nor during the law school application process.

Discrimination based on my race and/or sexual identity was inevitable. What I did not know was that the experience I had on that fateful Easter Sunday innately equipped me to meet that discrimination and overcome it when it appeared. At 11 years of age, that random man, who came to church being his authentic self, had a life I wanted to avoid experiencing. Twenty-five years later, I have come to appreciate his bravery and resilience in showing up in a place where discrimination was sure to be lurking. His courage to step out and be authentic in a place where it was frowned upon was the sort of sea-change courage that I needed to witness to become the successful lawyer that I am today.



Justin Pruett is a lawyer and senior claims supervisor for HCA Healthcare, Inc., where he manages medical malpractice defense litigation for physicians, hospitals, and surgery centers in some of the biggest health markets in the United States.



I AM ENOUGH

Meghan Thompson

Violence: intimidating or harming “the other” through physical acts (threats, assault, desecration, stalking, harassment, arson, murder, terrorism)

“**W**HAT DOES YOUR HUSBAND DO?”

“He’s a principal,” I quickly reply, and immediately, I internally deflate. Once again, I’ve let Fear intercept the truth. I fight hard to prevent Guilt and Shame from entering the scene. After all, it is a partial truth. My *wife* is a principal, and this stranger beside me on the plane was just being polite by asking the question. There is no need to make him uncomfortable by talking about my marriage to a woman. No need to cause a potential scene. No need to give him any reason to remember my face or name and tell someone later about the “lesbian” he sat next to on the plane.

Yet, my Fear of all these has made *me* uncomfortable, has caused a scene of chaos *within me*, and has cemented this moment of feeling ashamedly gay *for me*. Fear has caused the very thing I was trying to prevent. I did it to myself. It seemed safer than facing whatever someone else may have thrown at me. And what if? What if I had said, “SHE’s a principal.” What if this stranger hadn’t skipped a beat, but simply replied with, “Oh that’s fantastic. My wife has been a teacher for 22 years and a profession in education is not an easy one, but a necessary one.” I didn’t even give this stranger a chance to demonstrate allyship, but what if he had? What if he said his *husband* has been a teacher for 22 years? And then it hits me that I’m making the same assumption of him that he made of me, and that is a tough pill to swallow.

Alas, Fear overrides “what if,” and we spend a couple more minutes talking about my nonexistent husband before spending the remainder of the flight in our own worlds - mine slowly imploding and working to rebuild before my wife picks me up at the airport in two hours.

It was as if Fear had become this bossy, yet terrified leader at my internal control board who coached me for any given scenario. “Okay, let’s review. You show up to a meeting and see a ‘Safe Space’ sign. Can you say ‘wife’ or ‘partner’ and engage fully as yourself?”

Me: “YES!”

Fear: “Good! You get into an Uber in Alabama and the male driver asks for your number. What do you say?”

Me: “I’m married. My husband, Michael, and I have been married for two years this July!”

Fear: “Excellent. Next up - ‘When and where it is safe to hold hands with your partner.’ Ready or need to take five?”

I have never experienced physical violence. Emotional trauma, sure, but never physical violence. So, when and how did this happen? When did Fear become such a prominent leader at the control board? Was it when guy after guy said, “One night with me and I bet you’d turn straight.”? Or when gay marriage had just legalized and I picked my wife up from the airport with a sign that read, “My wife in ALL the states,” and she, looking both surprised and appalled, said, “It may be legal, but we still live in Louisiana. Put that sign away!” Was it then? Or was it when my family sent email after email telling me I was like the Israelites desiring to go back into slavery rather than press on to the Promised Land and to always remember that God punishes sinners? Was it when my dad and sister didn’t attend my wedding and their absence elicited a lack of security? Or was it a culmination of these and many other micro-moments, each one fueling Fear into the strong presence she became?

I’m not sure, but marriage did help weaken Fear. Something about boldly proclaiming one’s identity in front of others makes Fear lose a bit of her power. When no one stands up to hurt you, physically or emotionally, but rather cheers you on, Fear weakens. Something about having a partner who is in it with you and proclaiming her identity makes Fear begin to realize there is no place for her here. Each time I said, “my wife,” Confidence took a step toward the control panel and Fear shrank back.

And then we got divorced. Divorce - an event that happens to more than 50% of relationships, straight or gay. Divorce - an event that is heart wrenching and hell to go through, straight or gay. Divorce - an event that

makes one question one's beliefs and makes Self-Doubt a close companion, straight or gay. And in my case, divorce - an event that acts as a giant steroid shot for Fear and sends Confidence running. I first started coming out in 2008 and fought hard for acceptance from family, friends, and myself. I started going back into the closet when my divorce finalized in 2018.

I'm a 34-year-old woman and yet Fear is more present now than when I was a 24. Now I fight alone. Not only is it present once again with strangers, fearing what they may say or do, but it is now also with friends I've made since my divorce. Just two weeks ago I was with some friends who said, "Meghan, did your ex-husband..." and I can't even remember the question because I only remember being too afraid to correct them. One year ago, my sister whom I adore, reminded me that though she loves me, she believes my lifestyle is wrong and does not support it. Through tears I thanked her for being brave enough to be honest with me. OH, THE IRONY! The very quality I was praising in her, Fear was admonishing in me. "Don't be bold or brave," Fear whispered. "We cannot recover from any more rejection." And there it was. Why is Fear more present now? Because after experiencing the rejection of divorce, she isn't sure we can survive any additional rejection.

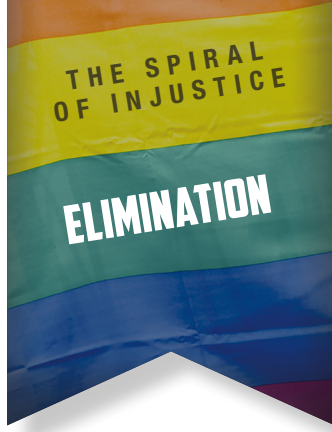
Then, just last week, there was a bit of a breakthrough. While camping, Jesse, a stranger and my neighbor at the campground, walked with me to collect firewood. He asked me about myself and for some unbeknown reason, Fear stepped away from the control panel and Honesty stepped up. "I was married for three years [pause] to a woman. We got divorced a few years back and now I'm back in the closet in many aspects of my life." It felt like a breath of fresh air. That brief, random moment reminded me

that I don't need to be married to have Confidence on my side. I, alone, am enough.

I, along with Fear, and a bit of Honesty, Confidence, and Hope press on to 35. I will continue working to strengthen the latter of those and to let Fear know it is okay for her to release control. I will continue reminding myself that no one has physically harmed me and that my own Fear is likely more harmful than any physical threat. I will continue to remind myself that the road to self-discovery is not a race. I will continue to count every step on this journey as a victory.



Meghan Thompson is a former K-12 educator and currently works as a District Partnership Specialist at IXL Learning where she supports school districts with how to best use IXL's educational software, combined with best-practice instructional strategies, in order to achieve instructional goals.



AS IF DEAD ALREADY

(Ni)Cole LeFavour

Elimination: eradicating “the other” through deliberate and/or systematic destruction of life and/or liberty. (CULTURAL: customs and traditions, language, art, history, science, political participation; BEHAVIORAL: segregation, isolation, relocation, resettlement, removal; PHYSICAL: murder, genocide)

THE WHITE MARBLE WALLS, FLOORS, curved stairs and domed ceilings of the Idaho Capitol make a particular sound. It’s a “Hush. Hush. Hush.” For decades, we’ve come—the gender pioneers and the gay—we’ve come asking for mention, for safety. For years, we came in suits and skirts. Some of us shined our shoes—to be respectful. We came with respect.

I’m gray now, but in the 1990s, I tried every approach. I called secretaries asking for meetings with those who make the laws. When they refused,

we waited in little groups for the Senators in the halls. But they knew the power of omission, of walking by us, walking away. And yet still, unavoidably, they found themselves face to face with us sometimes.

It's harder to be cruel when you look a person in the eye. For almost a decade, we came politely asking to tell our stories, to educate. Then for a decade more, politely, we came asking them to pass a bill to include us in the state's anti-discrimination law. Four words we asked them to add, "sexual orientation, gender identity." Those are our labels, they acknowledge our existence, allow safety, civil rights, employment, our right to do business, our right to be served. Ten long years of asking, yet still to them we did not exist.

We were so polite there in the "Hush. Hush. Hush," that one might question the harm we faced. One might not know about the baseball bats in the alley behind the Emerald Club, the beatings in the passage under the Balcony Bar, in driveways, on roadsides; the reservoirs and riverbanks where we've been left for dead.

Perhaps it's a curse or perhaps added discomfort to the lawmakers and those with the baseball bats, but we are everywhere and still often invisible. We're not born with marks or skin that says who we are. We might be born in any family, in any town, that gay uncle or aunt, that secret cross-dressing grandparent eternally erased but nonetheless indelible in the hall of shame a family quietly builds.

But our invisibility means that some of us can hide. A closet, a mask, a set of lies can protect, can insulate the lucky ones. We blend into the paneling of offices, construction sites, school classrooms, knowing we're safe in

invisibility where we're unsafe if exposed. But what life does an invisible person live? I cannot answer. When I came out, I had no father's boot, no religious text, no team of cowboys or rodeo queens to hold me down in an irrigation ditch until I lay still. My educated, comfortable parents loved me, had no conflicts with church or culture, nothing to force them to make me small.

But still, perhaps unlike much of America, I know what it feels like to be chased through dark streets by a car full of men after a kiss on a street corner. Many nights of my sleep revisit that breathless running and the blank stares of the diners in the McDonalds where Carol and I hid in our frightened escape. The blank stares are what I remember. We look gay. We do. And it was as if the families seated there in the yellow plastic booths didn't see us or our terror. It is that sense of being dead already or nonexistent that I'm talking about.

In 2004, I was elected to office. For eight years, I myself had a black leather chair and a microphone in the Senate chamber inside the Capitol under the dome with its "Hush. Hush. Hush." Every bill I crafted to end our omission, the unspoken nonexistence of my life and all the others, every bill for that purpose vanished, was swallowed in a chairman's drawer, voted down before it had a chance of ever being heard.

Nearly twenty years of asking, and when 2014 came, I had left and still nothing had let us be heard. Over the years, our erasure here has been held back by nothing but court decisions and the sheer and abstract force of human enlightenment and progress in cities and states far, far away. Here, even the laws written against us, against our marriage or love, do not mention us by name.

It's true, a people denied will be radicalized. We had tried all the polite ways of being seen. In 2012 we posted sticky post-it notes. We wrote messages by the thousands and the lawmakers had them taken down. So, we worked up a plan. We'd come in protest. We practiced in our gay bars and in coffeeshops. We prepared for the police, for yelling, for the threats and the lectures about how much damage we would do to our own cause by interrupting their business and standing in their way.

When that winter morning came, forty-four of us walked in protest inside the Senate. In silence we built barriers with our bodies, blocked doorways. We stood for hours on the marble floors, one hand held over our mouths to represent the "Hush. Hush. Hush." We told them to go back to their hearing rooms and begin writing us into the place that says firing us, evicting us and refusing to serve us is prohibited by law. When the yelling came and the shoving, their gaslighting and the threats, we were ready. We never spoke, never took our hands from our mouths to object. We let our silence speak.

Our demand: recognize our deaths, our losses, the rejection and obstruction, the young who have taken their own lives. We stood there until our bodies ached. Carmen was there with her Maddie gone, Julie too who lost her Ryan. Each mother held a picture, but the building kept whispering "Hush. Hush. Hush." Later came the murdered, the Steven Nelsons, the Simons too. All the missing were there with us as we stood in the hall outside the Senate Chambers, one hand over our mouths.

But it wasn't law they chose to change to answer us. They chose instead the handcuffs and the zip ties. So, we sang on the prison buses and came back again. They sent us to jail once, twice, ten times. We paid for it in

fines and hours of community service, in lost jobs and apartments. We paid in all the boxes we will have to check admitting our arrests for as long as we will live.

To be most clear, it was the gender-different in our numbers who paid the most. To be seen as loving someone of the “wrong” sex is one thing, but to be someone of the “wrong” sex is harder still.

I think often now of the suicides, those who erase themselves physically when the world erases them through torment, through cruelty. I think that, if those hundreds, those thousands we lost had held on, lived one more day and another, maybe that fire inside them, that sorrow could raise the volume of our voices to a scream. Maybe then we’d be together, be left with more than all that loss hanging now beneath the painted stars on the underside of the Capitol’s gray-blue dome.

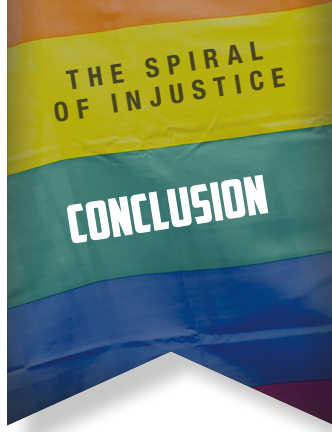
In the six years that followed our protest, we did return to polite tactics. But there was no shaking the weight of the silence in those chambers and soon, for some in the leather chairs, the cruelty of silence wasn’t enough. There are other forms of elimination. A person can wish for inclusion and get only obliteration in the form of law. In 2020 they banned transgender girls from women’s sports. They set down that the paper markers of gender on birth certificates could never change. Even the hormones so many need to live as their real genders, those they tried unsuccessfully to ban.

I hope still, every single day, that the tide of culture and court decisions will light a candle in the young, a candle so bright that even those in the stiffest of chairs, with the coldest of eyes could never snuff that flame with their hands.

Decades have passed while they've tried to erase us. But we are the tide of humanity. The generations that come after us are not afraid. Millions of the young now live between genders and love beyond them. Next year and the next, when the Senate gathers, the young will rise. They'll run for office and serve. From every valley in our state, they'll fill those seats with the compassionate until we exist in the mirror of law. If we persist, one day we'll no longer hear the "Hush. Hush. Hush," but instead the echo of our own footsteps, calling back to us, calling out, "You are here. You are real. You have voices. You are seen."



(Ni)Cole LeFavour is a writer, teacher, activist and former member of the Idaho legislature. Cole served for four years in the Idaho State Senate and four years in the Idaho House of Representatives before leading hundreds of Idahoans in peaceful acts of civil disobedience inside the Idaho Capitol. Cole grew up outside Clayton, Idaho and is married to Carol Growhoski.



TOO GREAT FOR HATE

Dan Prinzing

LIKE MANY, DURING THE PANDEMIC I was working from home as a safeguard from something that I could not see. The statistics were growing, so I knew it was there – I just did not know where.

Rather than attend in person, I streamed the live debate from the floor of the Idaho House of Representatives. Granted, it was not riveting entertainment, but I was interested in the outcome of a number of bills. So, I watched – and discovered a virus I **could** see.

With little debate, a new specialty license plate was approved - “Choose Life.” Proceeds from the plate will be split between the Idaho Transportation Department and Choose Life, a non-profit whose mission is to “help pregnant women choose life for their babies.”

It's a worthy sentiment; I too value life. I value a quality of life that respects the worth and dignity of each individual after birth. Unfortunately, what I watched and heard were a number of our elected representatives who do not. Or if they do, it must be a value for only those who look like, worship like, believe like, or live like they do.

House Bill 500 banned trans girls and young women from participating in women's school sports and would potentially subject any girl *perceived to be trans* to an invasive medical exam. House Bill 509 prevented trans people from changing the gender marker on their Idaho birth certificate, potentially subjecting them to even greater harassment and violence when traveling, seeking health care, opening a bank account, or enrolling in school.

House Bill 440, the Anti-Affirmative Action Discrimination Bill, removed protections for marginalized people when looking for employment.

SB1385 Criminal Abortion was a "trigger" bill that would go into effect should the US Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade*, allowing for attending physicians to be charged with murder. While others voiced objection to the bill on the grounds of the mother's health, one representative added her objection to the bill - she felt that the bill did not go far enough. Women who get an abortion should also be charged with murder.

Yes, another session ended without a hearing or consideration of adding the words "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" to the state's Human Rights Act.

Yes, the session ended without an expansion of Medicaid protections for the most vulnerable among us.

And yes, in the final hours of the 2020 legislative session, another specialty license plate was not approved. A license plate failed the necessary vote that would enable us to proclaim that Idaho is “Too Great for Hate.”

And it made me think, that just maybe, we have elected representatives who would rather “hate thy neighbor.”

And that too is a deadly virus.



Dan Prinzing is the executive director at the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights. The Center’s mission is to promote respect for human dignity and diversity through education and to foster individual responsibility to work for justice and peace.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each of the following have additional resources featured on their websites, so use this as a starting point to learn more, whether you are curious about a particular topic or looking for a specific service.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

[A guide to pronouns](#), from the Gay and Lesbian Independent School Teachers Network (GLSEN). Using someone’s correct pronouns (if they choose to use pronouns) is incredibly important and doing so can communicate your allyship. This guide addresses what to do when you mistake pronouns, how to use gender-neutral language day-to-day, and more.

[This website allows you to practice using pronouns](#) if you need to practice using different pronouns, including common neo-pronouns.

[This Vox article introduces Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), the scholar who termed “intersectionality,” and its central role in creating just and equitable change.

[The Williams Institute](#), based at the School of Law at UCLA, is a leading research center on LGBTQIA+ law and policy.

[The Movement Advancement Project](#) (MAP) also offers research, and tracks legislation that affects queer and trans people. Their signature

“Equality Maps” show state-by-state analysis of dozens of LGBTQIA+ related laws and policies.

The Gender Equity Center at Boise State offers workshops on a broad range of topics, including intersectionality, an introduction to the LGBTQIA+ community, and bystander intervention workshops.

LOCAL RESOURCES FOR LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Founded and owned by licensed professional counselor (LPC) Gabrielle Davis, who is Black and Queer, Equitable Counseling and Consultation offers intersectional and supportive telehealth therapy specialized toward queer, trans, Black, and Indigenous people of color. Idahoans can reserve a free 30-minute consultation. You can also sponsor counseling sessions for those in need.

Mutual aid groups: mostly based on social media, multiple mutual aid organizations in Idaho prioritize “solidarity, not charity” by meeting the requests of community members for everything from money and food to clothing for our unhoused neighbors. Search social media for mutual aid groups or find different organizations across the country on this “Mutual Aid U.S.A.” map.

Add the Words, Idaho began with the goal of advocating the Idaho legislature to update the Idaho Human Rights Act to protect Idahoans on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. The organization’s leaders are now leaders in mutual aid groups and political advocacy on many issues.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Idaho offers legal services and community programs in Idaho, as well as ways to take action. Information on their site is available in English and Spanish.

The Community Center is a local LGBTQIA+ resource that offers various programs including book clubs, game nights, and food assistance.

By focusing on ending violence against the most oppressed members of our society, the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence seeks to create change and prevent various forms of violence through community prevention and intervention programs.

Specializing in crisis and violence intervention, the FACES of Hope Victim Center located in downtown Boise offers support and space for those experiencing violence.

NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Transgender Law Center is one of the nation's largest trans-led organizations and offers legal services and information on the legal barriers facing trans Americans. Their "Get Help" function on their site offers guides to state-by-state procedures for changing legal name and documentation, as well information on COVID-19, immigration, prisons, healthcare, and more.

The American Civil Liberties Union has argued some of the nation's most famous civil rights cases and continues to do so for queer and trans people. Though the American Civil Liberties Union of Idaho is the most

helpful for Idaho-specific information, the national organization also offers resources and information for federal laws and policies.

Lambda Legal is another excellent legal resource with information to help inform you of your rights on a state-by-state basis.

The Gay and Lesbian Independent School Teachers Network (GLSEN) offers many resources for students, educators, and administrators to advocate for safe classrooms in practice and policy.

The National LGBTQ Task Force trains and mobilizes queer and trans activists across the nation in creating positive change for queer and trans individuals and communities.

Recognized as the educational arm of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial, the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights provides programs and resources designed to bring the Memorial's message into classrooms and communities.

We envision an inclusive society where Idahoans take responsibility for promoting and protecting human rights; where everyone is valued and treated with equal dignity and respect; and where everyone's human rights are a lived reality.

Our mission is to "promote respect for human dignity and diversity through education and to foster individual responsibility to work for peace and justice."



Wassmuth
**CENTER FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Home of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial

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