



Dedicated to helping LGBT people build and strengthen their families.

What's Kids Got To Do With It?

Out Of The Loop

On Thursday, July 6th , while Mona and I were viewing a special exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC (Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh), our laptop inbox at home was filling with emails about New York State 's court ruling: The New York Constitution does not compel recognition of marriages between members of the same sex (<http://www.prideagenda.org/pdfs/86-89opn06.pdf>). Our answering machine was filling up with messages, reminding us to meet folks at 7:00 in Hanover Square to protest the court's ruling. Jack tried in vain to call us from Syracuse ; I had forgotten my cell phone in our hotel room. Unfortunately, I didn't get Jack's messages until 6:00 , too late for us to catch a train to Sheridan Square and join other queer families in solidarity and protest.

It felt strange and a bit lonely to be out of the loop at such a critical time, but, in retrospect, I find some satisfaction remembering that while four of New York's six chief justices shot down civil same-sex marriage (for now), Mona and I were immersed in learning the story of one of the most powerful gender-benders in antiquity: Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt. Through life's twists and through her own ingenuity and political savvy, she reigned as Pharaoh for over twenty years. We viewed several sculptures, depicting an artistic metamorphosis from Hatshepsut's traditional image as queen, to a combination of her feminine form adorning elements of a pharaoh's dress: the nemes headdress and pendant bull's tail, representing the procreative power of ancient Egyptian royalty. Finally, there were two unmistakably masculine depictions of Hatshepsut, both in form and dress. In one she stands erect, clad in the regalia of Egyptian pharaohs and displaying powerful arms and hands. In the other, she is portrayed as a sphinx, with the body of a lion, huge carved paws and muscular haunches.

I'm reminded of the suggestion written by Judge Smith - author of the majority opinion - that the wrongs done to homosexuals, "have been widely recognized only in the recent past." As if recent recognition implies that historically we were not wronged or we did not exist. This issue of time persists throughout Smith's opinion, positing same-sex love and commitment as some postmodern fad. I don't pretend to know if Hatshepsut, by today's thinking, was a lesbian or transgendered, but she certainly challenged heterosexist constraints, the same constraints that 3,500 years later refuse us our rights. It's not by mistake that, upon Hatshepsut's death, images depicting her as having been a pharaoh or hieroglyphics linking her name with the title of pharaoh were destroyed. Curators argue that, "Hatshepsut's 'backstory' is more intriguing than the exhibit that resurrects her." And when Judge Smith claims that homosexual oppression has only recently been recognized, I wonder how much of our history has been intentionally destroyed and lost in "backstories."

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Visibility

One might argue that the story of Hatshepsut is a story of power struggles, not of enforced heterosexism. And the difference is? While Mona and I read through sections of Smith's opinion, justifying the majority's bias of limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples, she said, "We should put only gay and lesbian judges on the court. They can outlaw straight marriage." Children, living under parental rules about homework, bedtime, candy and television, have a keen sense of how power works. Adults may use words like sexism, racism and heterosexism, but it all comes down to abuse of power. If a queen/pharaoh can be erased from antiquity until twentieth century archeologists literally piece together her amazing accomplishments, I can't even begin to imagine the stories of less powerful folks who resisted heterosexual norms. Wrongs done to homosexuals have been "widely recognized only in the recent past" because our lives have consistently been dismissed or interpreted under a heterosexual lens.

Years ago, at a particularly memorable Syracuse Common Council meeting, there were more than the usual number of conservative evangelical Christians attempting to shove queers back in the closet and seal the doors shut. After hearing one too many times that we were essentially the reason for all that ails America, I had to respond: Some folks here seem to think they know exactly what Jesus would think of us, and it ain't very pretty. It's odd because we don't really know a whole lot about Jesus, but it appears that he was an unmarried man who spent most of his time with twelve other men and a few strong, independent women. He sounds a heck of a lot like the folks I hang out with.

You can imagine the response I received. But I wasn't as much suggesting that Jesus was queer as I was presenting my own queer perspective. Who knows? One thing seems obvious. He didn't put a whole bunch of energy into validating the notion that one-man/one-woman is the preferred way of moving through this world. From comments made by Evangelicals at the council meeting that night, one would think that all Jesus did was hang around with Ward and June Cleaver.

Mona, like all kids, knows a power play when she sees one; the reason that four judges found against us was because they could. We are an underclass that's thinly scattered across all ethnicities and races and economic classes, and we're visible, for the most, only when we're bold enough to be visible. When Mona and I boarded the bus for our trip to NYC, we got the usual stares. But it wasn't until Mona wearing headphones yelled, "The Beach Boys sound a lot like the Flirtations except they're not gay," that folks really took notice. I could have yelled back, "What makes you think they're not gay?" But I didn't. I could have stared back at the folks who were now staring at us and said, "Yeah, and I can't marry her other father." But I didn't do that either. Sure I'm out, and I've been out for years, but most straight folks see what they want to see, when it comes to acknowledging queer lives, and deny what they want to deny. It's their vision that's privileged. Sometimes being out requires being outrageous if you're going to make a difference.

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For Children's Sake

Judge Smith wrote that there are two grounds that rationally support limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples; both arguments were based on the needs of children. First, "...for the welfare of children it's more important to promote stability, and avoid instability, in opposite-sex than in same-sex relationships." The judge supports this bias by arguing that heterosexual not homosexual intercourse, "has a natural (my emphasis) tendency to lead to the birth of children." The judge further argues that since heterosexual relationships are, "all too often casual or temporary," marriage and its benefits when used as an, "inducement...promoting stability in opposite-sex relationships will help children more." Whose children? I find this to be blatant discrimination against the 6-10 million children currently being raised in LGBT-headed households www.RealFamiliesRealFacts.org. Our children are not granted the security of "stability and permanence." We wanted them; they were not the result of accident or impulse. At least not our "accident or impulse."

As an adoptee, I was an accident resulting from my biological parents' impulse. I was adopted by an opposite-sex couple who were married ten years at the time that they adopted me. Jack and I had been together 21 years when we adopted Mona. The "inducement" of same-sex marriage did nothing to ensure that either Mona or I would be raised by our biological parents in a stable and permanent environment, and my adopted parents were able to marry for the simple reason that they were straight, and Jack and I, Mona's adopted parents, are not able to marry for the simple reason that we are gay. It doesn't have a damn thing to do with the welfare of the child.

When queers are impulsive and our relationships are unstable, we're told that the problem is we're queer. What can we expect? It's best to join Exodus and become an exgay. But when straight folks are impulsive and their relationships are unstable, the State offers the "inducement" of marriage. I don't think the plan's working. Maybe we need an Exodus program for straight people.

The second reason Smith uses to limit marriage to opposite-sex couples is, "...that it is better, other things being equal, for children to grow up with both a mother and a father. Intuition and experience suggest that a child benefits from having before his or her eyes, every day, living models of what both a man and a woman are like." Well, my intuition and experience, having been a school teacher for twenty-five years, tells me that a child benefits most from having a consistent caring adult (or adults) in his or her life. I've seen countless living examples of what a man and a woman are like, but few models. And I'm unclear as to what the judge means by "other things being equal." Where is this ideal world with a bounty of ideal opposite-sex couples raising perfect children that the judge is imagining? It's not like straight people have been doing such a great job raising kids, and now queers might mess it up. Regardless, the judge exalts, "the common sense premise that children will do best with a mother and a father in the home." We may as well forget about research because studies are just not going to hold a candle to common sense, especially heterosexist common sense.

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Bottom line is that not only do these judges want to deny us marriage, but they also want to deny us our children. On our recent trip to NYC, after I paid for three nights in a four star hotel (okay I reserved the room through priceline.com, but still...), took Mona to see three Broadway shows, nearly had a stroke after watching her fall from climbing ropes in Central Park, figured out how to work the fool tapes at the Hatshepsut exhibit, and paid \$13 for pancakes at the Stage Deli that Mona wanted, but barely touched, I didn't even blow my cool when Mona got angry at me because I wouldn't buy her a lollipop. I may have been tempted to leave her to fend for herself and hop the first subway to Christopher Street, in search of a sympathetic ear, at least for starters. But then I thought: What would a straight father do? Unfortunately, I was hard pressed to imagine a straight father choosing to spend three days with his daughter. I guess I just haven't met enough "living models."

Overall the judges based their ruling on the, "undisputed assumption that marriage is important to the welfare of children." In part, our queer argument for marriage sounds a lot like the judges "undisputed assumption." So where's the conflict? In the Washington Blade Online, National Lesbian and Gay Taskforce head, Matt Foreman, writes, "As for the New York marriage opinion, the only good news is that the decision is so pathetic we won't need to worry about thoughtful judges in other states relying on it – they'd be too embarrassed." I'm not so sure. In fact, using children as the basis of their argument, bogus as their reasons appear, might very well serve as precedent setting in future rulings around adoption, insemination and what Judge Smith refers to as "other technological marvels." We can mock their findings all we want, and we should; humor is a queer survival tool, but let's not make the mistake of thinking these judges are dumb.

Meanwhile

Ironically, last week we were guests at an amazing straight wedding. Our friend, Jackie, lost her husband suddenly from heart failure due to an asthma attack a little over two years ago. The bitter-sweetness of her new wedding was marked by poetry written and read by Jackie's three daughters and by another friend who is a published poet. The ceremony also had a uniquely Afrocentric influence, a celebration that Hatshepsut would have surely enjoyed with its libation in honor of the ancestors, rhythmic drumming and singing, sensual and joyous dancing, and the bridal parties' attire – evocative of African royalty.

Parenting was not the motivation for this marriage. Jackie and her new husband were fortunate enough to find each other at a time in their lives when each thought grief would be their only companions. And for whatever personal reasons, emotional and practical, they chose marriage to seal their relationship. I am truly happy for them. I look forward to the time when my LGBT brothers and sisters will be granted the same choice.

For some light and hope, read Judge Kaye's dissenting opinion
<http://www.prideagenda.org/pdfs/86-89opn06.pdf>.