

Summer 2017

Hindsight

Justin J. Rudnick

Minnesota State University, Mankato, justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Rudnick, J.J. (2017). Hindsight. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, 6(2), 85-86. doi: 10.1525/dcqr.2017.6.2.85

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Hindsight

ABSTRACT As a reflexive practice, hindsight enables a subject to re-observe how moments in the once-present past come to bear on a now-present future. Such observations enable us to make (new) sense of our life's trajectory, re-casting seemingly inconsequential moments as "prophetic" happenings. In this essay, I revisit a series of connected moments in my past to examine how actions I took as a then-heterosexual man influenced the construction of my now-queer identity. **KEYWORDS** Hindsight; Memory; Queer; Identity

In November 2006, my home state of Wisconsin placed an initiative on the general election ballot. The famed "Question 1" proposed amending the state constitution's definition of marriage to one man and one woman. At the time, I was a nineteen-year-old college sophomore, in the fourth year of a four-year relationship with my high-school girlfriend, and I had finished a summer-long mission trip during which I preached the good news of Jesus to unsuspecting vacationers on the beaches of South Carolina. I—or rather, that "past-I"—believed homosexuality was sinful. The ballot initiative provided him/me a chance to *do* something about America's "growing gay problem." So, in November 2006, I strolled into my polling place to vote for my very first time. I was directed to a cramped booth surrounded by makeshift curtains where I was sure I would vote in favor of limiting marriage. I picked up the shortened and dull pencil, maneuvered my hand to Question 1 on the ballot—and voted *against* the ban.

Later that night I sat comfortably at my Bible study, in a cramped but cozy dorm room surrounded by my closest friends. We settled down, and I was surprised as our leaders began by asking how we had voted on the marriage amendment. As I listened to my peers, my friends, explain why they agreed that marriage should be between opposite-sex persons, my heart began to flutter. I didn't know why I voted the way I did. How could I explain the feeling that washed over me in that tiny voting booth, filling me with an unfamiliar

certitude? How could I describe the fire that ignited in my chest in that moment when I committed myself to a decision that seemed so wrong, just as it seemed so unequivocally *right*? When it was my turn to answer for my vote, I heard my shaky voice pronounce “I voted against the ban.” Confusion and disappointment radiated from my leaders, upperclassmen who I deeply admired and whose approval I desperately craved. My eyes burned a hole in the floor as I weathered their righteous refutations. I was embarrassed, yes. But I was not ashamed. That night, some seed of conviction took root deep within me. It would take years to sprout, but it was strengthened by this winter that failed to freeze it.

Hindsight is a funny thing. I like to think that, in the moment of my vote, the cosmos aligned and inspired me to save my now-queer self from the humiliation of actively impeding my own human rights. I don’t know if I *actually* believe this to be true, but I do know that it doesn’t matter. The ten years that separate me from the person I used to be have brought with them some tumultuous experiences: my abandonment of the church, my liberal indoctrination, my coming out, and a number of interactions both good and bad that have cultivated my now-present identity.

Hindsight is rather illuminating. ■

JUSTIN J. RUDNICK is Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The author would like to thank Devika Chawla for her inspiration and guidance throughout the transformation of this script, and the members of her Ethnography and Oral History course for their supportive presence during its performances. A previous version of this script was performed at the 2016 National Communication Association annual convention. Correspondence to: Justin J. Rudnick, Communication Studies Department, 230 Armstrong Hall, Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN 56001, USA. Email: justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu.