

This photo of stairs to a clinic I previously worked at provided me a sense of how a hostile work environment might have an impact on my self-identity/concept. While it was a extremely difficult period, this somewhat time-limited stigmatizing experience for me can't be compared to what might be a life-long experience of stigma for the MH consumers I serve. I hope that this powerful visual representation of our inner world would bring on greater awareness of the varying degrees of stigma we all face one way or another, and remind us of the importance of mutual support and the need for leadership that makes every step count.



*This project was sponsored by San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Office of Diversity and Equity.*



Education is a big theme in my family. All my sisters before me have gone to college and obtained a degree. In my Hmong community, especially among my own peers, I feel stigmatized because I choose to be well-educated. There are those who believe I am no longer rooted within my own culture and no longer know how to enjoy life because of my educational choices. Yet they do not understand that just because I chose to attain an education away from my family and relatives it does not mean I have cut all ties to them. My family is still my first priority and my education is my family's top priority, which keeps me going in times of need.



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Sometimes we can't avoid the stigmas that are imposed upon us whether it's intentional or un-intentional. Stigma can make us feel guarded, left out, or discouraged. Making a change to counteract stigma takes effort and deep thought. This is my oasis where I think, reflect, and make a change amongst the vastness of nature.



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US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton recently delivered a speech to the United Nations on the status of LGBTQ rights in the U.S. She spoke on why other countries need to distinguish Gay Rights, she spoke on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and how people still have arcane views regarding homosexuality. It is described as a “landmark” speech AND I want her to deliver these kinds of speeches in this country because there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done for Gay Rights in the US.

LGBTQ individuals are still being beaten or killed in this country because of their sexual orientation or because they do not fit the cultural norm.

I still have hope that we can better ourselves as human beings and be welcoming to all communities. I want to be able to love, have happiness, and not be fearful of expressing my love to my partner wherever and whenever.



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This photo reflects my process of assimilation and acculturation. I am continually accepting and discarding aspects of American and Indian cultures, according to where I am and who I'm with. Choosing one will make me feel stigmatized by the other. I often question what I value and believe. I experience a relentless internal struggle that is illuminated by my daily experiences in my family, work and the community. I aspire to be in that moment when I feel like I'm in my element, balanced, with the best of both worlds.



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This is a photo of food I eat regularly because of how it tastes, looks, and makes me feel. While it may look like just a colorful mix of veggies and fruits, it's also a source of stigma in my professional, personal, and social life. Because of my food habits, people often assume I judge those who don't eat the way I do, or that I'm dieting, or that I couldn't enjoy french fries or pizza (I love them both!) or in a few instances that I must have some type of eating disorder. This stigma sometimes leads to exclusion, mockery, and even shame.



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